AUG.
35c

THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Johnny One-Eye
by DAMON RUNYON

The Turn of the Tide
by C. S. FORESTER

The Port of Peril
by VAN WYCK MASON

The Hampstead Murder
by CHRISTOPHER BUSH

The Sacrificial Lamb
by WILLIAM CAMPBELL CAULT

THE GOLDEN FROG
A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING SIZE PUBLICATION

TO OUR steadily lengthening list of writers of so-called "better" literature who just couldn't resist trying their hands at our craft of mystery fiction, add the name of C. S. Forester. Mr. Forester's chronicles of the life and exploits of a certain Horatio Hornblower, from midshipman to admiral, are deservedly rated classics of nautical adventure. In THE TURN OF THE TIDE, however, we have caught him on quite different ground—if we may use the expression. Not that he has strayed out of sight of salt water even here, or failed to produce another kind of classic.

William Campbell Gault, for contrast, in THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB, is only doing again what he has been doing superlatively well for many a year. And what's wrong with that? This tense and solid novelet is the proof that an old pro is hard to beat.

It has always been our (I seem to be stuck on that pontifical pronoun this month) opinion that there is far too little mystery writing with a laugh in it. When we feel that an issue of this magazine needs some comic relief, we always have a hunt on our hands. And as often as not, we find ourselves printing another misadventure of Damon Runyon's fabulous guys and dolls. This doesn't mean we are apologizing for JOHNNY ONE-EYE. We just wish there were more authors who could write stories like that.

From Broadway to Britain is an even bigger jump psychologically than longitudinally. So just to keep you on your toes we decided at this point to toss in another of those peculiarly British cameos of calamity which Christopher Bush (no stranger to these pages) does so well. THE HAMPSTEAD MURDER is one of his deftest.

Only two months ago, I recall, I had a story in the book about the Saint in Havana. But I claim no corner on the territory of Cuba; and just to prove it, we are turning the island over in this issue to Van Wyck Mason. THE PORT OF PERIL, if you haven't forgotten some very recent goings-on in Central Amerca, is as up-to-date a yarn as we've ever published; and you may well like his picture of Havana better than mine. You pay your money and you take your choice.

Anyhow, the Saint story this month, THE GOLDEN FROG, is laid in Panama. That's how I can afford to be so generous with the map.

Leslie Charteris

In Your Mind's Eye

The Secret of MENTAL CREATING

IF YOU just like to dream, read no further. There comes a time when your fancies *must be* brought into light—and stand the test of every-day, hard realities. Are you one of the thousands—perhaps millions—whose thoughts never get beyond the stage of *wistful wishing?* Do you often come to from a daydream with the sigh, "If only I could bring it about—*make it real?*"

All things begin with thought—it is what follows that may take your life out of the class of those who hope and dream. Thought energy, like anything else, can be dissipated—or it can be made to produce actual effects. *If you know how to place your thoughts* you can stimulate the creative processes within your mind—through them you can assemble things and conditions of your world into a happy life of accomplishment. *Mental creating* does not depend upon a magical process. It consists of *knowing how* to marshal your thoughts into a power that draws, compels and organizes your experiences into a worthwhile design of living.

ACCEPT THIS *Free* BOOK

Let the Rosicrucians tell you how you may accomplish these things. The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization), a world-wide philosophical fraternity, have preserved for centuries the ancients' masterful knowledge of the functioning of the inner mind of man. They have taught men and women how to use this knowledge to *recreate their lives.* They offer you a free copy of the fascinating book, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how you may receive this information for study and use. Use coupon.

SCRIBE: N. O. L. The Rosicrucians (AMORC) • San Jose, California

Send free copy of "The Mastery of Life," and I shall read it as directed.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)
SAN JOSE CALIFORNIA

THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1955
VOL. 4, NO. 2

The Golden Frog 4
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Johnny One-Eye 39
by DAMON RUNYON

The Hampstead Murder 52
by CHRISTOPHER BUSH

The Sacrificial Lamb 63
by WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

The Turn of The Tide 87
by C. S. FORESTER

Too Many Enemies 96
by EDWIN BAIRD

No Smoking 104
by HUGH WILEY

The Potsherd of Anubis 116
by SAX ROHMER

The Port of Peril 132
by VAN WYCK MASON

The Cat Killer 150
by PETER HARRIS

The Key 153
by MICHAEL INNES

H. L. Herbert
President

Leo Margulies
Publisher
Editorial Director

Leslie Charteris
Supervising Editor

THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, Vol. 4, No. 2. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y.
The characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. Copyright 1955, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. AUG. 1955. PRINTED IN U. S. A.

You Still Have Time . . .

—TO COMPLETE YOUR SAINT FILE
—OF THE WORLD'S *FINEST* FICTION
—BY THE WORLD'S *GREATEST* WRITERS
—OF MYSTERY-DETECTIVE *STORIES*

Here's your chance to pick up 18 of the 19 issues published to date. The first issue, we're sorry to say, is all sold out. A few copies are still available of all others and they are yours by filling in the coupon below. THE SAINT *is always star-studded by the best writers in the field. We are now offering these at bargain prices —single copies at 35¢; three copies at $1; six copies at $1.75; and twelve copies at $3.25. When ordering, circle the issues desired.*

Names to conjure with are scattered throughout all issues, for the stories are by the most famous writers of mystery, crime and detective fiction in the world—such greats as: Leslie Charteris, Ben Ames Williams, William Faulkner, Ben Hecht, Craig Rice, Philip Wylie, William Irish, H. G. Wells, Damon Runyon, Octavus Roy Cohen, Sax Rohmer, T. S. Stribling, Clarence Budington Kelland, Dorothy L. Sayers, Hugh Wiley, Ellery Queen, Agatha Christie, Ray Bradbury, Graham Greene, Brett Halliday, P. G. Wodehouse, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Edgar Wallace, Mignon G. Eberhart, Hugh Walpole, Q. Patrick, Cornell Woolrich, G. K. Chesterton, Hugh Pentecost, Leslie Ford, Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas Walsh, MacKinlay Kantor, Rufus King, Peter Cheyney, George Fielding Eliot, Fredric Brown, and many, many others.

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Kindly send me the copies of THE SAINT whose issues I have circled below. One copy at 35¢, three copies at $1, six copies at $1.75, twelve copies at $3.25. I enclose $_____ in full payment—no additional charges for postage.

JUNE '53; AUG. '53; OCT. '53; JAN. '54; MARCH '54; MAY '54;
JULY '54; SEPT. '54; OCT. '54; NOV. '54; DEC. '54; JAN. '55;
FEB. '55; MARCH '55; APRIL '55; MAY '55; JUNE '55; JULY '55.

Name_____

Address_____

City, Zone, State_____

Please Print SD 58

the golden frog

by . . . Leslie Charteris

As fabulous as a lost Mayan city was Dr. Nestor's Panamanian frog. But mirrored in its golden sheen Simon saw–Death's curving scythe.

PROFESSOR Humphrey Nestor, it must be revealed *ab initio,* had never actually been a member of the faculty of any of the illustrious colleges whose names he liked to drop casually into his conversation; nor, to be utterly candid, did he possess any of the academic qualifications which could have made it even remotely possible that he might some day be offered such an appointment. In fact, some prejudiced persons had been heard to asseverate, perhaps wishfully, that the only chair of importance that Mr. Nestor was ever likely to occupy would be wired for high-voltage electricity; but this was an exaggeration. Mr. Nestor was not by nature addicted to violence.

At this time he was only 55, and still spry and lean of frame; but his hair had already attained the snowy whiteness which in the minds of the gullible is simultaneously suggestive of both wisdom and benignity, and he had parlayed that fortunate coloration into a trim mustache and goatee which, combined with the bifocals that had been thrust upon him willy-nilly by the normal incipience of presbyopia,

gave him an air of erudite distinction that only the most adamantine skeptic could resist. And though he had no right whatsoever to the title which he had adopted as a vocational convenience, he was by no means illiterate.

He owned, among a unique collection of forgeries, an absolutely authentic degree from a minor university whose track team had been well repaid by his youthful gift of running very fast for short distances. And he had a predilection for magazines of the popular science and science-fiction type which gave him not only a useful repertoire of abstrusities but also invaluable models of what the public expected a Professor to be like. As a result, Professor Nestor was a much more convincing Professor than almost any ivied turret could produce—as a great many suckers had expensively learned.

Yet such are the vicissitudes to which a great talent may be subjected that on the day we are talking about Professor Humphrey Nestor was scraping the bottom of the barrel as literally as he was trying to suck the last drops of ice-diluted fluid through the straws that protruded from what had once been an ambrosial beaker of Panamanian rum punch.

"I can't think what we've done to deserve such miserable luck," he lamented.

"One thing is, you're getting old," said the shapely blonde who passed as his daughter Alice.

Their real relationship was of course much less conventional; but since she was almost exactly half his age, the father-daughter act was far more disarming than if he had introduced her as his wife, and indeed was likely to arouse positive sympathy instead of a raised eyebrow. And there was the added advantage that this arrangement imposed no tiresome restrictions on the exploitation of her sex appeal, which was not negligible.

There were times, however, when he wished she would maintain a semblance of daughterly respect when they were alone, and this was one of them.

"You're in a rut," she said, with unsympathetic candor. "Sure, we had a good line once, but nobody's been buying it lately. Instead of moaning about your bad luck, why don't you start figuring out something new?"

"Because it's still a good line," said the Professor stubbornly. "The very best. I spent a lot of time dreaming it up. It's worked fine for us down here—and we're lucky to be here."

There was much truth in that.

Some five years earlier, a purely technical error in the use of the mails had occasioned this rather abrupt deflection in a career which had long been devoted (with remarkably few interludes

in jail, all things considered) to the cause of parting fools from their money with a promptness that would have gladdened the proverb-coiner's heart. One day Professor Nestor woke up to realize that instead of a civil suit which he could have outranged by simply stepping over the nearest state line, he had laid himself open to federal retribution that would not be halted by any parochial boundaries within the United States.

But he was a provident and foresighted man in other respects, and was never without an alternative identity sufficiently well documented to satisfy the liberal requirements of most Latin-American countries, which are not inclined to make excessive difficulties for apparently solvent tourists. A banana boat happened to be sailing from New Orleans at a moment which it would be almost an understatement to call opportune, and in due course the Professor and Alice found themselves in Panama with an indefinite period of exile ahead of them.

Humphrey Nestor surveyed the situation and was not displeased. Such a precipitate departure as they had been forced to make might easily have landed them in any of the forsaken backwaters of the hemisphere. Instead of which, they had been neatly unloaded on one of the world's busiest bottlenecks

Through the Canal passed endless fleets of passenger-bearing vessels of all sizes and qualities, not to mention the coastwise trade and cruise boats of the Pacific and the Caribbean which touched the ports on either side of the isthmus, providing one of the basic essentials for the exercise of Mr. Nestor's peculiar talent: a bountiful supply of transients with time on their hands, money in the bank, a minimum of factual information about the locale, and a romantic predisposition to believe strange and wonderful tales appropriate to an exotic setting.

He was reasonably sure that he had left no trail behind him, and he was not much worried about the police of the American zone, who were more concerned with the security of the Canal than with operations of his type. And there was the unique advantage of a completely invisible and unguarded frontier with the Republic of Panama, so that merely by crossing a street one could pass back and forth between jurisdictions—a convenience which he found extraordinarily comforting.

All that remained was to adapt one of their tried and proved routines to get the utmost value out of the scenery and atmosphere at their disposal. And this he had accomplished with such virtuosity that there were now $23,000 in a pension fund which

they had accumulated by ruthlessly setting aside fifty percent of all their killings.

Alice was the sole custodian of this fund, which she had insisted on as her price for continuing the partnership.

"We're not going to live this way forever," she said. "We're going to save up, and one day we're going to retire and live like any other retired people, without ever having to worry again."

There were times when the Professor wondered whether he was really included in those plans for her future. But he was forced to accept her terms, for very few bunco compositions can be played effectively as solos, and she was an invaluable confederate. This arrangement, however, explains the apparent paradox in the statement made earlier that at this moment the Professor was suffering an acute financial squeeze.

"If we don't find a mark very soon indeed," he said, "I'm going to have to borrow something from our retirement fund."

"Then you'd better find a mark very soon, Pappy," she said promptly. "Because our retirement fund is not lending."

"But this would be an emergency," he argued. "After all, we've both lived off the half share that doesn't go into your fund, and all the other expenses come out of it too. You can't do any good in this racket without capital."

"Then I hope you connect while you've still got some," she said. "But if I let you get your fingers into that fund on one excuse, pretty soon you'd have another, and before long there'd be no more fund, and we'd be on our way to the poorhouse in a Cadillac just like when I met you."

"You haven't done badly since we teamed up," he reminded her tartly. "For a B-girl who never did anything bigger on her own than roll a drunk—"

"That's why I went for you, Pappy," she said sweetly. "I knew you had what it takes. Only I don't know how I'd feel if I thought you'd lost it."

"I could do fine if only we got a break," he said. "I had that rich Australian solidly hooked last week, didn't I? And then his daughter has to get polio and he turns around and flies home and that's probably the last we'll hear of him."

"Anyhow, he got away," she said. "And we didn't get a cent out of him."

The Professor sighed over the remorseless inflexibility of feminine logic, and looked glumly around in search of some happier conversational diversion.

They were sitting in the bar of what unschooled tourists will always call, redundantly, "The" El Panamá—at that time the

newest and most luxurious (and most expensive) hotel in the Republic. Built and operated by Americans for Americans, it was the counterpart of fifty kindred air-conditioned caravanserais which had raised their uniformly modernistic facades of glass and concrete and aluminum during that generation amid every conceivable skyline from mud huts to minarets and Spanish tile to Norman towers—all dedicated to the proposition that since air travel had brought the farthest corners of the globe into everybody's back yard, no traveler should be allowed to feel that he had ever left home.

Sooner or later an inevitable nine-tenths of the best-heeled travelers were bound to stroll at least once through its patios and lobbies, and Professor Humphrey Nestor was a regular customer for reasons which happily combined business with pleasure.

"As the great Barnum said, there'll be another along in a minute," he remarked bravely. "Now suppose we had one more drink—"

"We'll have six more, if you can pay for them," said Alice accommodatingly. "Only don't try to stick me with the tab, because you'd look awful undignified trying to race me to the door."

They might have continued indefinitely with another bout of these genial exchanges, but at that very moment a new patron strolled into the bar whose aspect called a truce to recriminations as abruptly as a soundless bomb.

His supremely comfortable costume of featherweight slacks, sandals, and a shirt that appeared to have been designed with the help of a kaleidoscope, plus the inevitable camera slung over one shoulder, branded him frankly and cheerfully as a tourist. But not just any tourist. There were gradations in these markings for which the Professor and Alice had eyes that would have sent a vulture looking for an oculist. The slacks were tailored of the lightest Italian shantung, the shirt was a still finer silk, even the sandals were of beautiful leather and finished like expensive shoes. The camera was the newest and most costly model Leica. And his face and arms had the bone-deep kind of tan, subtly different from the superficial browning of a brief vacation, which marks a man who habitually spends most of his time out-of-doors.

True, there are humble laborers who share that privilege with the leisured wealthy, but although this man was slim-waisted and wide-shouldered he moved with a casual grace and assurance that left no possible doubt about which category he belonged in. And although an indefinable keenness of eye and rakishness of feature suggested

that he might at some time have known a ruggeder form of outdoor life than a golf course or a fashionable beach, a certain spirit of adventure in the victim was a contribution rather than an obstacle to the ideal dénouement of the plot in which the Professor and Alice had so often played their profitable rôles.

All in all, if they had been given some kind of supernatural carte blanche to design the type of character that they would have most liked to see walk into the bar at that moment, it might well have turned out to be a recognizable facsimile of the newcomer whom we have just described.

For almost half a minute they were too distrustful of this apparently divine dispensation to be able to speak.

It was Mr. Nestor who recovered his voice first. The new arrival, he finally convinced himself, was no mirage, of the kind which is reported to torment the thirst-crazed wanderer in the Sahara. Mr. Nestor could see him quite normally and three-dimensionally through the upper part of his bifocals.

And Alice had seen the same thing at the same moment. He could tell by the pure spirituality that had descended on her rather childish face, and by the fact that she had not taken advantage of his own silence to get in any more shrewd licks.

"Well," he said heavily, at last, "will you trust me to start this one in my old-fashioned way, or would you rather take over?"

"Go ahead, Pappy," she said, and added almost affectionately: "Just don't ham it up too much like you do sometimes."

He waited with agonizing patience until his quarry's drink was almost finished, and then he picked up his modest box camera and ambled over to the bar.

"Pardon me, sir," he said bashfully, "but I see that you're a photographer, and I wondered if I could impose on you—if you'd be so kind as to snap a picture of my daughter and myself with *our* camera?"

"Why, of course," Simon Templar said amiably.

"There's no hurry. Whenever you can spare a moment."

"I've nothing but moments to spare right now."

Simon laid a dollar bill on the bar and slid off his stool. The Professor turned back towards the table where he had been sitting.

"Alice, dear," he said, "the gentleman very kindly says he'll oblige us right away."

As she came to join them, he said shyly: "My name is Professor Humphrey Nestor, and this is my daughter Alice. Might I know whom we are indebted to?"

Simon had a preposterous alias which in some circumstances

came almost instinctively to his lips.

"Sebastian Tombs," said the Saint, without hesitation.

II

"It's terribly sweet of you," Alice said, looking up at him with big blue eyes as if he had volunteered to bring her the moon in a platinum casket. "You know how it is—usually Pappy takes a picture of me, and then I take a picture of him, but we never have one of the two of us together."

"I know how it is," said the Saint sympathetically.

"Really, I should get one of those timer gadgets that let you get into your own pictures," the Professor reproached himself. "I so often have need of one."

They went out into the glaring shade under the umbrella trees, and the two Nestors stood rather stiffly and naively side by side, smiling at the camera, while Simon clicked the shutter.

"We ought to have one with the Frog," Alice said.

"Yes, yes," agreed the Professor, frowning. "If we aren't taking up too much of Mr. Tombs's time . . ."

"Not at all," said the Saint agreeably.

It would have been almost a psychological impossibility for anyone with a shred of human curiosity to have torn himself away without waiting to see that last shot.

Alice opened her capacious purse and took from it a soft leather pouch with a drawstring. From the pouch she took a package wrapped in tissue, about the size of an orange. The Professor fussed around helping her to unwrap it, until the contents was revealed on a nest of the loosened paper.

It actually was a frog. A rather slender, long-bodied frog. Or, to be more accurate, a carving or moulding of a frog, very simply but excellently done. And the most startling thing was that it looked as if it might have been made of pure gold.

"Could you come a little closer," said the Professor, "and get a good picture of the frog, perhaps with just our faces looking at it?"

Simon moved in obligingly, while they held the frog up on its wrapping between them, and clicked the shutter again.

"Hold it a moment," he said, unslinging his Leica. "I'd like to get one for myself, for a souvenir."

They held still briefly while he took the picture again, and then quickly helped each other to rewrap the figurine.

"We're very, very grateful," said the Professor, with unsophisticated earnestness.

"We took Mr. Tombs away from a nice cool drink," Alice

said. "I think we ought to get him another."

"Of course—how stupid of me! Won't you let us do that, Mr. Tombs?"

"I was hoping you'd say that," Simon replied, with a beatifically disarming smile which made it seem unthinkable that he could actually have meant it.

They went back into the cool dimness of the bar, and a round of Panamanian punches was ordered. After which there was a kind of conversational hiatus, as if in spite of his sincerity and good intentions the Professor's social gifts had been exhausted by the providing of refreshment. He seemed to withdraw into an unworldly introspection; and his daughter only seemed to be able to look at him devotedly and rather anxiously, as if she knew what was on his mind and would have liked to help him with it but did not know how.

It was obviously up to the Saint to break this awkward pause, and it would have taken a positive effort to refuse the handiest and most natural gambit.

"That frog of yours," he remarked. "That's quite an unusual piece."

"It is," said the Professor, coming a few miles closer in interstellar space.

"Not that it's any of my business, but it almost looked as if it was made of gold."

"It is," the Professor agreed.

"Pappy," Alice said gently, "aren't you being a little rude? I can see why Mr. Tombs would be curious. After all, we made him take our pictures with it."

"Yes, so we did. Pray accept my apologies, Mr. Tombs," said the Professor contritely. "I was only afraid of boring you. You couldn't really care about our scientific troubles."

"Never mind our scientific troubles," Alice said. "Tell him the interesting part."

Mr. Nestor pursed his lips. "Well," he ventured diffidently, "did you ever hear of *Atelopus zeteki?*"

"Do you catch it on a rod and line," Simon asked, "or from going barefoot in hotel bathrooms?"

"It's the Golden Frog of Panama," Alice explained.

The Professor dredged an inner pocket of his sagging seersucker and came out with an ancient and shabby wallet of portfolio dimensions. He fumbled, blinking nervously, through an assortment of beat-up snapshots, newspaper clippings, old envelopes and tattered palimpsests on all kinds of paper, which bulked it to the thickness of a light novel, and extracted a documentary relic which on being gingerly unfolded proved to be a page from an old issue of *Life*. It carried a single photograph in full color which centered on a large tropical leaf on which was

crouched a long-bodied frog that was almost entirely a bright yellow from nose to toe.

"That's the Golden Frog," said the Professor. "It's one of Nature's oddities, which could only have evolved in the tropical rain forest around here. A beautiful creature, isn't it? You'll notice that this one has a certain mottling of black on it. Some of them have polka dots. The ones that are all gold are quite rare. But it's such a fragile product of its environment that just a few minutes' exposure to ordinary sunlight are enough to kill it!"

He was simply paraphrasing, quite accurately, the caption under the picture, but he had a way of doing it so authoritatively that he made it sound more as if the caption was quoting him. Letting the dupe handle and read that indisputably genuine page of *Life* at the same time was a trick that invariably clinched the acceptance of his own scientific standing, and even more subtly it extended an aura of veracity over the fable that he had to pyramid on that one fact.

"That's very interesting," said the Saint respectfully. "Did you discover it?"

"Oh, no. It was discovered by a former colleague of mine, Dr. Zetek. That's why it carries his name. What I discovered was the frog that you saw—what we might call *Atelopus nestori.*"

Professor Nestor chuckled coyly over his scholarly little joke.

"Of course, our golden frog was modeled from the real one," Alice said.

"You can easily see how it would happen," said the Professor. "Long before Dr. Zetek or any of us came here, the real golden frog was naturally known to the aborigines. And it was the sort of phenomenon which could hardly help striking the imagination of a primitive and superstitious people.

"The transformation of a tadpole into a frog of any kind is almost like seeing a miracle of evolution take place under your very eyes. Then think how still more awed they must have been when they saw that some tadpoles apparently no different from the others turned into frogs that seemed to be made out of the same precious metal that they would find in rare nuggets among the gravel of their river beds.

"Add to that the peculiarity that these frogs were so delicate that if captured, no matter how gently they were handled, they would die for no reason that a savage could understand—and to anyone who knows anything about primitive psychology, you have all the necessary ingredients for the origination of a religious cult."

"You mean your golden frog is a museum piece?" Templar asked.

"Well, at least five hundred years old," replied the Professor. "Perhaps a great deal more. The only other one that I had ever seen—before I came here—was brought to me when I was lecturing on pre-Columbian artifacts at Michigan State University, by a tourist who picked it up on the San Blas Islands. He wanted to know if it had any antique value apart from the metal in it. Of course, I recognized at once that it was not San Blas workmanship, but he could tell me no more about its history.

"Naturally it hadn't occurred to him to ask the Indian who sold it to him how he had come by it. I could only tell, from certain technical indications, that it was very old, perhaps even contemporary with the Mayan culture. I tried to buy it, but the owner was much too wealthy: the cash value meant nothing to him, but he wanted it as a souvenir, and an antique to boast about as well if he could have obtained an official pedigree for it."

"But you don't give up so easily, do you, Pappy?" said Alice adoringly.

"I must say, I went on thinking about it. And then, quite by chance, I happened to hear of Dr. Zetek's golden frogs. One glance at a picture was enough to show me that they must have been the model for the little metal frog that I had been shown. After that, to a scientific mind with my special background, the other deductions were almost elementary. Some prehistoric culture in Panama must have made a fetish of the golden frog and used images of it in their rites . . . But I must be boring you."

"Not in the least," said the Saint truthfully. "This is something they don't have in the guide books."

The Professor nodded complacently. "Not yet. I was not foolish enough to discuss my deductions with anyone at that point—except Alice."

"You wouldn't believe how careful a scientist has to be, these days," Alice explained. "It's almost as bad as being an inventor. There's so much competition for the only college jobs that pay a living wage, and so many colleges seem to hire professors just for their box-office value, according to the books they've written and the things they're supposed to have discovered—so when a professor thinks he's on the track of something really big he has to guard it like an atomic bomb so that somebody else won't steal it."

"You can't blame them, considering how few decent salaries a university can pay, except to a football coach," said the Professor, with an unworldly resignation that would have tweaked the heartstrings of the most indurated cynic. "Let's just say that I

had enough human vanity to hope that my own name might go down to history along with some discovery that I'd made all by myself.

"I had a little money that I'd saved up to give Alice a start in life, but she insisted we should spend it on this. Finally I took my sabbatical, and we came down here to try to find the evidence of this cult. We made three different expeditions, into parts of the country that had never been explored. Some of it was really rough—especially for Alice." He paused to glance admiringly at his daughter.

Simon followed the glance with a raised eyebrow. "Did you go along too?"

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world," Alice said. "Even when I was a little girl I was always pestering the boys to take me hunting and fishing with them. I only wish I could live like that all the time."

This was one of Mr. Nestor's deadliest inspirations. He had found that the time-honored bait value of a blue-eyed blonde with the face and figure of a Hollywood starlet was multiplied tenfold by the revelation that she would honestly prefer a fishing camp to a night club.

In the presence of such devastating credentials, strong men became misty-eyed and indeed were sometimes hard to bring back to mundane preoccupations. Mr. Nestor observed an unmistakable hint of reverence in the way Mr. Tombs was looking at Alice, and hurried on before he lost his audience completely.

"I won't bore you with all the details. But we succeeded—more than I'd even dared to hope. We not only found proof of the cult of the Golden Frog, we found perhaps *all* the relics of it that will ever be found."

Simon removed his gaze from Alice with undisguised reluctance. "You mean you found more than that one frog I took a picture of?"

"To be exact, we found thirty-seven. And we found them all at once, in a cave that we literally stumbled into by the sheerest accident."

"Some defunct witch-doctor's Olde Frogge Shoppe?"

"I think there's a better explanation. As you'll remember, the Spanish conquistadors were here, as they were all over Central and South America. And as you know, the main thing the Spaniards were looking for was gold. It can't have taken the priests of the Frog very long to find that out, but they must have been smarter than most of the other Indian tribes.

"They must have rounded up as many of the images as they could and hidden them in this cave. The entrance was so well hidden that no one could ever have found it unless he accident-

ally fell into it like I did. The specimen that the tourist brought to me must have been one that some individual hid on his own or that got lost somewhere, but the main collection was never found.

"Probably all the priests who knew where it was died under the tortures of the Inquisition without betraying the secret. Anyhow, no one can have set eyes on their treasure again until we found it."

"Are the other frogs all the same size?"

"More or less, most of them. My hypothesis is that they were in the nature of icons, issued to minor priests or chieftains as a symbol of authority. But there were three images as big as footballs which must have presided over important lodges or perhaps their equivalent of cathedrals, and one absolute whopper, nearly as big as Alice, which must have been the original idol that all the others were modelled from."

The Saint's lips took the shape of an awed whistle. "You don't say they were solid gold?"

"I have seen no evidence that those Indians knew the arts of plating, or making alloys," answered the Professor dryly.

"And to think I once started to feel sorry for you," said the Saint. "I should apologize. If I'd known an archaeologist could hit that kind of pay dirt, I might have gone in for it myself."

The Professor smiled faintly. "Would it be impertinent to ask what your business is, Mr. Tombs?"

"I suppose you'd have to call me a speculator," said the Saint, with studious honesty. "I dabble in anything that looks interesting at the time. I may say I've done pretty well at playing my hunches."

If there could be any more mouth-watering description of the type that Professor Nestor prayed every night that Providence would send him on the morrow, the Professor had yet to hear it. Only a lifetime of professional discipline enabled him to sigh with the convincing tinge of envy that was called for at this point.

"I wish I could say the same, Mr. Tombs. I suppose I just wasn't born under a lucky star."

"With a cave full of golden idols, you've certainly got problems. Like income tax, I suppose."

"But the idols are still there in the cave, Mr. Tombs."

"Till you go back for them."

"Yes, yes. That, of course, is the problem."

"And we don't want to lose our heads over it," Alice said.

Simon frowned interrogatively.

"We'd just about taken it all in," elaborated the Professor, "and we were heading back to camp for the cameras and flash bulbs to make a proper record

before we disturbed anything, when the headhunters attacked. It would be hard for you to believe, Mr. Tombs, sitting here; but in less than an hour's flying time you could parachute into a jungle world as untamed as it was before Columbus sailed . . .

"We'd been hearing the drums for days, but hoped they were only trying to scare us. It was a tragic under-estimate. The native bearers we'd left in camp never had a chance, poor devils, but the uproar told us what had happened. We managed to cut across to the river and push off in one of the canoes before we were spotted. We fought a rear-guard action downstream for two days before they gave up the chase."

"Just you and Alice?" Simon asked, open-mouthed.

"And Loro, our half-caste guide and interpreter. A wonderful fellow. I only hope nothing happens to him before we go back. That is," said the Professor, coming hollowly back to earth, "if we ever do go back."

"If I knew where there was a cave full of golden idols," said the Saint, "I'd like to see any drum-beating headhunters stop me."

"Probably you can afford to say that," Alice said gently. "But it costs a lot of money to organize the only kind of expedition that'd stand a chance. We're going back to try to raise the money, of course—"

"That shouldn't be difficult."

"I hope you're right," said the Professor dubiously. "But as I told you, you remember, we didn't even get any pictures. We haven't anything to show except the one golden frog that you saw. It all depends on how much my scientific reputation is worth. Well, time will tell."

"They've got to believe you, Pappy," Alice said.

"Yes, indeed, my dear." The Professor patted her hand.

He had put on one of his most polished performances, not hamming it any more than the part called for, and if the audience wasn't well hooked he should start learning his business all over again. Now it was up to her to carry the ball.

"But we've bored Mr. Tombs enough with our problems." He consulted his watch. "And I have to call the curator of the Museum. Will you excuse me?"

He got up and pottered vaguely out into the lobby. He had practiced that gait until it had become almost a part of him—it suggested a kind of ingenuous and earnest helplessness which was peculiarly convincing. Alice's eyes followed him protectively.

"Poor darling," she said. "It means so much to him."

Simon offered her a cigarette. "There's no real chance that you won't raise the money, is there?

I should think he'd only have to wire his University—"

"It isn't as easy as that. You see, no one even heard of the Frog cult before he deduced that it must have existed. And you've no idea how skeptical scientists can be, especially about someone else's discovery. It's not only scientists, either. There's a man who has a desk out in the lobby who calls himself Jungle Jim: he organizes jungle trips for tourists. If you asked him, he'd tell you there aren't any headhunters in Panama. Of course he doesn't take his parties anywhere near the headhunter country, and he doesn't want them scared off, but you can imagine what someone who was checking up on our story might think."

Simon nodded. "Have you tried already and been turned down?"

"No. As a matter of fact, we've hardly told anyone. We have to be awfully careful. If the Panamanian government heard about it and believed it, they'd claim it and send a company of soldiers to get it. That wouldn't matter to Pappy, so long as he got the scientific credit, but you can guess how many of the frogs would mysteriously disappear on the way back. In fact, the expedition would be just as likely to come back and swear they hadn't found anything at all—or maybe never even come back, if you see what I mean."

The Saint decided that it was not up to him to dispute this libelous estimate of the Panamanian militia. "How much would it cost to go in and get those frogs?" he asked.

She had the figure ready, arrived at by an intuition that had seldom failed her: it had to be small enough, compared with her assessment of his means, for him to consider without undue anxiety, but it should also encompass every last dollar that the operation might be expected to yield.

"About ten thousand dollars," she said, and he didn't blink.

"Someone might go for that as a straight business gamble, in return for a fair share of the loot."

It was not so much a statement as the thinly veiled basis for an offer; but she shook her head.

"That's the trouble. Pappy would never allow it to be treated as loot. All those frogs would have to go into museums. He'd rather they stayed lost for ever than see any of them melted down, or even put up for sale."

"Then you certainly are looking for a philanthropist."

"I know, it isn't realistic. But who could mistake my Pappy for a realist? Now, I'm different. If I could get him just a few of those frogs—enough to make one museum exhibit and a lot of pictures, and prove his theory and make him famous—I would-

n't care what happened to the rest."

Simon regarded her contemplatively, and suddenly she leaned closer and impulsively put a hand on his arm.

"Tell me something," she said. "I don't know why I'm talking to you like this, except that I feel you're a terribly wise person. But I've got to ask you. Suppose I managed to find some businessman who was a bit of a gambler, and made a deal with him on my own." It was consummate artlessness that continued to keep the discussion impersonal, so that she was absolved of any suspicion of propositioning him.

"If I got just a few of those golden frogs for Pappy, he needn't even know what happened to the rest. The headhunters might have found the cave after we left and taken most of them away, but what he didn't know wouldn't hurt him. He could write his articles and be famous and die happy. Would you think I'd done something very wrong or very good?"

Simon pondered for long enough to calculate what the approximate value of the golden frogs that Nestor had described would be.

"I'd think you should have a medal," he said. "And if you decide to make anyone that sort of offer, I wish you'd give me the first chance."

She looked at him in a dazed and startled way as if a halo had literally appeared over his head like a neon light, and her big eyes swam with soft, half-unbelieving tears.

"I'm afraid I shall have to desert you tonight, dear," said Professor Humphrey Nestor, noting the artistic symptoms with approval as he returned to the table. "Some former colleagues of mine from Columbia are passing through here. They happened to be calling on the curator when I telephoned, so I had to speak to them. They insisted on me joining them for dinner, but I shall not inflict that ordeal on you. I know our shop talk would bore you to death."

"That's all right," Alice said, with her eyes still on the Saint and the most tentative conspiratorial smile touching her lips. "Mr. Tombs just asked me if I could get away to have dinner with him."

III

She suggested the Jardín El Rancho, and as soon as he saw it he had to approve of her selection. It was like the courtyard of a Spanish hacienda, tile-roofed around three sides but uncovered to the stars in the center, and open everywhere to the perfect mildness of the night. The service was competently unobtrusive, and the lighting was artistic enough to encourage romance without

causing eyestrain. But at first they were strictly practical.

"How would you work this scheme of yours?" he asked.

"Remember, I was at the cave too. I know where it is as well as Pappy."

"You mean you'd go back there yourself—headhunters and all?"

"I would if I had to," she said bravely. "If there was absolutely no other choice—"

The Saint shook his head. "That doesn't sound so good."

"I can't say I'm crazy about it," she admitted. "So I don't mind telling you I had another idea."

"Give."

"Loro—the native guide who took us into that district."

"Don't tell me he'd want to go back there."

"He might. He just about adopted Pappy as his own father, but for some weird reason he practically worships me. Probably because I'm blonde and blue-eyed, and I treated him like a human being—oh, yes, and he got an infected foot once, and I fixed him up from the first-aid kit.

"It sounds ridiculous, but these natives are like children, and he's at least fifteen-sixteenths Indian. And after the headhunters had chased us out, he told us we'd gone about it all wrong, and if he'd known what we were after he could have gone there alone and got it without any trouble."

Simon tenderly impaled a pink shrimp on his fork, coated it lightly with sauce, and slid it between his teeth to confirm an earlier impression that the shrimps of Panama are for some unexplored reason the most crisply ambrosial representatives of their genus in all the legendary seven seas.

"Do you know where to find this reckless warrior?"

"Yes, he's still around. As a matter of fact, he came to our hotel a little while before you picked me up—Pappy had already left to meet his friends. He wanted to know if there was any chance of our making another expedition. I was just going to tell him that it wouldn't be for a long time, if ever, because we'd spent all our money; and then I had this idea. I asked him to stop by here at nine o'clock, so you could meet him anyway."

They had *sancocho,* the rich chicken soup with vegetables that can easily become a meal in itself, but left themselves room for some excellent beef tenderloin sliced in mushroom sauce which was entirely European in conception and flavor. He asked many more details about the finding of the cave of golden frogs and the escape from the headhunters which Professor Nestor had skipped over; but that also

had been anticipated. The Professor had read many helpful books, and had schooled her so exhaustively that she was never at a loss. Simon's admiration increased undisguisedly as the meal progressed.

"You'll find campus life pretty tame after this, won't you?" he remarked.

"Oh, I won't be going back there with him. I'd hate to be a burden like that to him, poor dear, on his salary. I earn my own living—I'm a very good secretary. Of course I'll have to look for a new job. I had to give up my old one when we came down here. But now I've developed a yen to see more of the world. I'm going to look for a business man who does a lot of traveling and who'd like to take a Girl Friday with him."

"It mightn't be easy to keep him at a strictly businesslike distance."

"Well, that mightn't be hard to take if I really liked him," she said frankly. "I'm not hopelessly old-fashioned."

It was obvious that they could have made beautiful music together.

Loro arrived when they were having coffee, and accepted a seat and a bottle of Balboa beer. He was a pudgy brown man in a clean but unpressed white shirt and trousers, with long black hair, a single gold earring, and a wide, white-toothed grin. He looked like a genial brigand, which was precisely what he was. Quite early in the Professor's exile, he had volunteered to carry the Professor's bag from a taxi into a hotel; turning from paying off the driver, the Professor had just been fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of his suitcase and Loro disappearing around the next corner.

Mr. Nestor, who could still put forth a most respectable turn of speed in an emergency, had overtaken him within two blocks; but to Loro's even greater astonishment he had not capped his victory by calling for the police. Instead, he had given him five dollars and invited him to have a drink. Mr. Nestor had already realized that a native accomplice might be almost indispensable to whatever bunco routine he finally adapted to the locale, and the problem of finding a native with the requisite guarantees of unscrupulousness had been most happily solved.

Loro's larcenous instinct immediately recognized a master, and he had become a very gratifying pupil. His part was relatively simple, and he brought to it an innate flair for dramatic deceit.

"I go back any time, *señor,*" he said in response to Alice's prompting. "Bring back frogs. Me *indio.* No trouble."

"Then why did they have

trouble before, when you were with them?" Simon asked.

"Headhunters see me with *yanquis,* they think me like *yanqui.* Much trouble. Cut off all heads." Loro made a graphic gesture, laughing delightedly. "*Yanqui* heads very valuable, but they take mine for small-change. Okeh. Me go alone, wear no clothes, they see me *indio.* Can be friends. No trouble."

"Why didn't you go back by yourself, then, and get the frogs?"

"Cost much money, *señor.* Too much for me."

"But I thought they were going to be your friends."

"Sure. All good friends. Okeh. Me go to cave. Okeh. Me take out frogs. Headhunters see. They know gold very valuable. No more friends."

"Tell him how you thought of doing it, Loro," Alice said, regarding him steadily.

The guide leaned over his bare forearms on the table. "Take plenty guns, yes. But who going to shoot them? No good take soldiers, they steal everything. Take other *indios,* they no can shoot straight. Or headhunters come, they run away. Okeh. I got better idea."

"What is it?"

"Sell guns to headhunters. For gold frogs."

"Do you think they'd trade?"

"Sure. Headhunters want guns. Get more heads, more quick." Loro chortled tolerantly. "Not our heads, we no worry."

"How many guns would it take?" Simon asked.

"I think, fifty, with bullets—can do."

"But that's impossible," Alice said. "You couldn't bring in that many guns. The Panamanians would think you were trying to start a revolution. And you couldn't buy that many here, for the same reason. Why, we had the worst time getting permits for our twenty-two rifle and one shotgun."

"Give me money, I get," Loro said. "I have friends, keep guns, wait for revolution, wait too long, get tired. They take money for guns now, think maybe they buy more guns *mañana.* But it cost plenty. Maybe two hundred dollars each gun and bullets."

"Then we wouldn't save anything," said Alice. "It would still cost ten thousand dollars."

"Save much trouble. No fighting. Save heads."

Simon lighted a cigarette. "What would you want for doing this?" he asked, in a casual tone.

Loro's fat cheeks dimpled on each side of his jolly bandit's smile. "Me, for love, *señor.* For the *señorita* I love. But perhaps I buy some guns more cheap, not pay all two hundred dollars. Me keep some dollars for working. You will not ask me give back, okeh?"

"Okay," said the Saint steadily.

Loro stood up, beaming. He bowed deeply to the girl. "I go now. I tell you soon, all is ready. *Buenas noches, diosa.*"

He was gone, melting into the darkness of the parking lot outside the patio as he might have melted into the jungle. Professor Nestor had painstakingly taught him to do this instead of scooting out as if he had dropped a firecracker with a short fuse.

Alice was looking at the Saint with misty eyes. "I can hardly believe that my crazy idea is all coming true," she said.

"I wouldn't call it so crazy," he said. "And I like Loro's contribution. Now that we're more or less partners, would you risk telling me what part of the country this cache of golden frogs is in? I bought a map this afternoon to help my feeble geography."

He took the map from his pocket and spread it on the table between them. She moved her chair around towards him until their shoulders touched, and the perfume of her hair was sweetly close to his nostrils as she leaned over to study the tinted outlines.

"We're here." She pointed to the southeastern end of the Canal. "We'd have to charter a boat—the same one that Pappy and I had, if we can get it. We go out here, past Taboga Island, and down the coast to the mouth of this river. Then we go up the river. It's quite deep, most of the time, and Loro knows all the channels—up—up around here . . ."

Her red-lacquered fingernail traced the winding course of the stream more hesitantly, but finally settled on a definite point. "Yes, the headhunters' territory starts here, at this third fork. So the cave would be a little farther north, about—there."

Simon gazed at the map as if instead of its green ink he were seeing the lush rain jungle itself. Even though he was far more familiar with such stories than most men, he felt the tug of romance in it as appreciatively as the most frustrated slave to a stock market report. There could have been no higher tribute to the cunning with which Mr. Nestor had blended its ingredients.

"I'm going to enjoy this trip," he said.

"Would you want to go along?"

She asked the question for necessary information, but he stared at her almost indignantly. "Do I look like a guy who'd miss anything like that?"

"No—quite the contrary. That's one thing that bothers me. You've got that daredevil look. So I'll have to make a condition. You've got to promise me you won't try to go beyond that third fork on the river. You're not an Indian, like Loro, and you could-

n't pretend to be. I don't want your head cut off and shrunk and dried. I wouldn't want anything at that price. Promise you won't try to go all the way—or it's no deal."

It was a classic touch. She acknowledged and openly hero-worshipped every valiant quality and impulse that a man would like to be credited with, and in the next breath she absolved him of any uncomfortable risk of having to live up to them, and prettily made it a command. Nobody but the Saint would have been so sincerely ungrateful.

"You're the boss," he said curtly, for there was no doubt that she meant it. "But we go as far as dam-*yanquis* can. Right?"

"Right."

"Okay. But how are you going to explain this to Pappy?"

"You know, we've got reservations to fly back tomorrow night. This has all been so sudden . . . The only thing I can think of is that I'll have to make some excuse and let him go alone. But what excuse is there? I can't pretend to be sick, or he'd never go."

She was suddenly almost panic-stricken, groping desperately for an answer. "I've told him before about wishing I could be a traveling secretary. Could I tell him that you've offered me a job? Would you mind if I did that?"

Simon laughed. "If it's as easy as that, consider yourself hired."

She clung to his arm impulsively for a moment. "If Loro can do what he says he can, I won't hold you to it."

"I might like being held," he said. "But we'll have plenty of time to talk about that. If your father goes for it. I'll just have to keep my fingers crossed, because I won't even be able to help you sell it."

"Why?"

"I have to go over to Cristobal first thing in the morning. I've got an old friend in the Navy who's stationed on that side, and he's promised to show me some sensational tarpon fishing on the Chagres River. He can only get two days off, so I'll be back on Friday. If I find you've checked out, I'll know it was just one of those things."

"I'll be here, I promise," she said. "And by then Loro should have lined up those guns."

When Simon left her at her hotel several hours later (Professor Nestor did not make his residential headquarters at El Panamá, both for reasons of economy and because it would have been grossly out of character) she kissed him goodnight, not alarmingly, but with a spontaneous warmth which suggested that her full gratitude would be more than perfunctorily enjoyable.

The Professor was sitting up in bed, wearing a suit of gaudy

pajamas and reading a luridly jacketed paperback.

"We're cooking, Pappy," she said. "Everything went just like the script. Even better—he's going away for a couple of days fishing, so there won't be any problem about seeing you off."

"Splendid," said the Professor. "But I'd better go up to Santa Clara as usual until after he's left, so there'll be no chance of accidentally running into him."

Santa Clara is a seaside resort on the Pacific Coast which is supported mainly by Service personnel and Canal employees, and the average tourist is unlikely even to hear of it, let alone visit it. The Professor had found it a convenient and pleasant place to lie low in when he was supposed to have flown back to the States.

"This'll be one of the long jobs," Alice said. "He's determined to go up the river himself as far as I'll let him. That means I'll have to get my hands all fishy and my shoulder sore from that blasted shotgun, and pretend I like it."

"That's too bad."

"Oh, well, maybe I can get his mind on to something else at least part of the time."

"I notice your lipstick is a little smudged," he remarked. "With a routine as good as we've got, I don't think you need to develop your part quite so far in that direction as you've been doing."

"Would you rather get someone else to do it?" she inquired. "I'll play it the way I feel it, or quit. There isn't much fun for me in this place. And this is one John who isn't a bit hard to take."

When the following Friday morning went by without any phone call, she experienced a qualm that was almost as much personal as it was mercenary. She would have sworn that it was practically a toss-up whether Sebastian Tombs was more attracted by herself or the golden frogs, but as the afternoon wore on she began to wonder how both lures could have failed simultaneously. When her phone rang at last, after five o'clock, she was so relieved to hear his voice that her tone was quite angry.

"What ever happened to you?"

"I've been busy," he said mildly. "You sound almost like a wife—or a boss."

"I'm sorry." She recovered herself quickly. "I guess I was getting worried. After seeing my father off and waiting here, I was starting to think how silly I'd look if you never came back."

"Two things I never stand up, darling," he said, "are a beautiful blonde and a chance to make easy money. How's Loro doing?"

"He's been calling me every hour. He's got all the guns and ammunition, but his friends are pressing him for the money."

"Tell him they can have it as soon as the banks open tomorrow."

"What have you been so busy with—boss?"

"I got a tip over on the other side that should be worth a fortune," he said. "I'll tell you when I see you. Will you be gorgeous and hungry if I pick you up, let's say, at seven?"

She had to struggle with an assortment of vague apprehensions until she met him. There were several facts that he might have heard or learned from someone who really knew the country that could have shaken the foundations of his belief in the Professor's imaginative story, yet he had not sounded at all hesitant or skeptical. And when he greeted her he was unrestrainedly jubilant.

"This could be the greatest break for us," he said. "My pal on the other side is a fly boy in the Navy, a full commander, no less, but he's never given up hope of getting rich some day. He thinks he has all the opportunities, and all he needs is a bit of luck. He used to dream about making a forced landing on some unheard-of mountain of gold, or a dry wash full of diamonds. Lately it's uranium, and he never takes off without a small Geiger counter in one of his life raft ration cans.

"Well, every place he goes, he studies up on the local mining laws, because when he strikes pay dirt he doesn't intend to be hornswoggled out of it on some technicality. So I told him that I was thinking of scouting for some gold around here myself—without giving away any of your secrets, of course—and he told me that any minerals you find in Panama belong to the government, unless you've bought a prospecting concession in advance for the exact area where you find 'em. Did you know that?"

"No," she said, with a blankness that did not have to be feigned.

"Anyway, that's how it is. But my pal knew all the rules, so as soon as I got back here this morning I went to work to take out a prospecting concession on the area you'd shown me on the map. My trouble was, it's such a little known law that half the officials I talked to hadn't heard of it themselves. Or maybe it's just been too long since anyone did any serious prospecting around here. It took me half the day to find the right bureaucrat who could issue the concession, and it was even tougher getting him to do it on the spot, instead of *mañana,* or next month. But I finally made it. Look!"

He triumphantly unfolded a closely typewritten sheet of heavy paper. It was trimmed and embellished with an imposing variety of stamps, embossings, ribbons, and sealing wax, with

a number of ornate signatures, but it was all written in Spanish, and about the only words that she recognized were the name of Sebastian Tombs.

"What does it say?"

"Cutting out all the gobbledegook, and the Castillian whereases and heretofores, it simply says that I have this prospecting concession for the district you showed me, for ten days starting tomorrow. You see, to try and prevent anyone hogging a concession and doing nothing about it, they put the hell of a price on them, a hundred dollars a day, and the longest you can take 'em for is three months. Then, if you make a strike, you can renew 'em by the year; but then naturally you don't mind the price.

"That's why the area we're interested in wasn't tied up: nobody would pay that much rent for a prospecting license except for the time he'd be using it. This fancy scroll cost me a thousand bucks. From what you told me, I figured ten days should be plenty and it gives us the right to keep all the golden frogs we can find in that time."

The release from all her apprehensions was such a letdown that she felt slightly hysterical. It took a titanic effort at that moment to gaze at him with the awed and eager appreciation which she knew was called for, but somehow she achieved it.

"You're wonderful," she said. "I can see now why you must be a very successful speculator. You don't miss anything. But we shouldn't need anything like ten days. I've already arranged for the boat, and we could leave tomorrow morning if you like."

"I like," said the Saint.

IV

The departure of Loro on his intrepid mission to contact the headhunters was in itself almost worth the price of admission. Stripped down to a leopard-skin breechclout, his hair bound in a fillet of brocade that supported a couple of brightly-hued parrot feathers, with slashes and curlicues of paint on his face and chest, he would have satisfied any Hollywood studio wardrobe department.

Professor Nestor had had to work hard to persuade Loro that it was necessary to go to these theatrical extremes. It had been comparatively easy to convince him that when the sucker paid over his money, Loro should not simply disappear with all of it, for Loro could never hope to steal that kind of money again on his own, but by working loyally with the Professor and Alice he could expect to share in such killings at frequent intervals for an unlimited future.

So, having shown the Saint a stack of oilcloth-wrapped bundles piled in one of the cabins

of the boat, with Alice vouching that she had personally inspected and helped to wrap the guns, and having received a thick wad of hundred-dollar bills as promised, he had taken it docilely to the hired car in which Professor Nestor was waiting to leave for Santa Clara, receiving in return only $3,000 for himself and $3,500 in an envelope to be taken back to Alice.

But after the first of such divisions, Loro had taken it for granted that they would all three disappear. The Professor had explained that the victim would then complain to the police, which would be a severe handicap to any future activities. In that case, Loro had suggested cheerfully, it would perhaps be better to take the boat some distance out into the Gulf of Panama, tie the victim to some of the weighted bundles, and drop him over the side.

The Professor had explained patiently that the mysterious disappearance of an American, especially a wealthy one, could hardly fail to cause an investigation which would be very likely to come embarrassingly close to them.

"The very best confidence jobs, my dear Loro," the Professor had pontificated, "don't even let the sucker know that he's been taken. Isn't it worth a little time and trouble to give our customers a real show for their money, and know that we'll never have to worry about them hollering for the cops?"

He had eventually secured Loro's cooperation, but had reason to doubt if he would ever completely make his point.

Even on this occasion, at the first opportunity Loro had when the Saint was at the other end of the boat, he said to Alice: "All this waste plenty time. Much better tonight I—"

He drew an expressive forefinger across his throat. He was half serious and half teasing her, she could tell from his malicious grin, but she was surprised to feel herself shudder.

"Stop it, Loro! . . . Anyway," she said, in an attempt to cover up the sharpness of her reaction, "this one is a perfect example of what we've tried to explain to you. He's actually taken out a prospecting license from the government, and he must have told a dozen people where he's going. If he disappeared, we'd have too many tough questions to answer."

It was only after she had said it that the fantastic thought crossed her mind that Sebastian Tombs might have done all that, and taken pains to tell her about it, as an elaborate precaution against the very thing that Loro was advocating, and a subtle warning that if perchance that was what they had in mind they had better forget it. But the im-

plications that followed were so far-fetched that she had made herself brush the idea aside.

Now bundles of alleged rifles and ammunition had been unloaded from the boat and cached at the edge of the jungle, and Loro was ready to play out the last sequence of Professor Nestor's ingenious script.

"You go back down river a little," he said. "One mile, plenty, only so headhunters no see. *Mañana,* this time you come back, you find me with gold frogs."

"Be careful, Loro," Alice said anxiously.

"Me always careful," Loro said, with his jolly bandit's grin. "No worry. *Hasta luego diosa.*"

He spoke in rapid dialect to the boat captain, an uncle of his who had been a fairly honest fisherman before he was conscripted into the team, who was not very bright, but who had a non-speaking part which was almost foolproof since he understood no English and hardly any Spanish.

Loro cast off the lines which had held the boat to the bank, and the captain started the engine as it began to drift downstream. Loro stood and waved until it vanished around the nearest bend, and then picked up one of the oilcloth packages which had been providently ballasted with a case of rum and plodded towards the next turn upstream, where there was a village of utterly harmless Indians who were always glad to see him and whose daughters were especially hospitable. He would stay there, very pleasantly, until the boat came back for him in a week or two.

Simon stood beside Alice on the narrow deck, gazing silently at the wall of tangled greenery that slid past them until the captain turned the boat in midstream, aimed the bow diagonally up towards the bank, cut the engine, and shuffled forward to throw a line over a leaning tree and snub the boat to a berth as nonchalantly as any airline pilot ever made a landing.

The Saint was frowning. "I seem to be a bit confused," he said. "I thought when you came here before you had a lot of native bearers, who got massacred. Then you fought a rearguard action for two days down the river. And yet we came here all the way from Panama in two days, and Loro is going to make a deal with the headhunters and be back with the golden frogs tomorrow."

Again she was barely touched by a fleeting uneasiness, but she was ready with the answer.

"Last time, we were exploring. We went off on big swings through the jungle, covering as much ground as we could. We were on one of those hikes when we found the cave. We'd left the boat way down near the mouth of the river. When we fought our way back to it it was

along these banks, only we were on foot. We followed the river because it was the only thing that saved us from getting lost, but you can see what rough going it was."

"There's a limit to how far we can go with this," the Professor had said, when he taught her the speech. "If we gave 'em a full two-week safari, for that kind of money, we'd be almost legitimate."

Simon nodded uncritically. "I should have figured that out for myself," he said. "It must have been pretty rugged."

"I'd rather not talk about it," she said, and meant every word.

She despised herself for the palpitation that his unreserved acceptance of her explanation had set at rest again, but she was in no hurry to expose herself to any more potentially devastating questions.

"Shall we try some fishing?" Alice asked. "Loro says that snook come all the way up here to spawn."

He was still studying the banks rather than the water, his keen eyes raking along the ragged edge of the forest as though searching for something more than timber and foliage.

"I'd prefer to tramp around on shore a bit, as soon as we've got some lunch under our belts," he said. "I wouldn't want to have to go back and say I'd never set foot in this wilderness. We can take the shotgun, and maybe pick up something good to eat."

She had only her own build-up to thank for his bland assumption that she would not want to be left behind. She thought wildly of all the facile excuses she could make, but she realized that every one of them would have a hollow ring. So far he had only heard talk about her tomboy virtues, and if she seemed to wriggle out of the first opportunity to display them he could hardly help being touched by a flicker of suspicion. And once a man started to doubt, there was no forecasting where his skepticism would turn next.

She gritted her teeth and wished that lightning would strike him, but she forced herself to say: "That would be fun."

Four hours later she was nearly ready to strike him down herself. Following the river on foot was a minor nightmare which developed its miseries cumulatively but inexorably until their weight and blackness was smothering.

Sometimes they were stumbling over tangled roots, sometimes sinking above their ankles in thick gluey mud, almost continuously warding off branches, leaves, fronds, vines, and thorns that poked and scratched and tugged at clothing and bare skin.

The only respite from that harassment was when they took to the river to circumvent a par-

ticularly impassable thicket on land: then there was the treachery of invisible hazards underfoot, the haunting fear of crocodiles, and the discomfort of boots full of water for a memento. Winged and crawling things in infinite variety tickled and bit them.

She was soaked with mud up to the hips and with sweat above that; her blonde hair hung in bedraggled skeins. She swore bitterly to herself that if she survived this excursion she would insist on some basic re-writing in her part next time.

The Saint was equally hot and muddy, but his good humor seemed to feel no strain. He could be fascinated by a sloth which they came upon suspended from a cecropia bough, too sluggish to stir even when he touched it, and he could exclaim delightedly over a toucan taking off before them and speculate earnestly as to why its enormous yellow bill didn't send it immediately into a fatal nose-dive.

At other times he seemed to continue seeking for something, picking up a small rock to examine it or taking a handful of loam and gravel from the bank and crumbling it between his fingers, until she had had to ask what he was doing.

"I told you I was a speculator, didn't I, darling? It wasn't only your golden frogs that intrigued me. They suggested something else which you seem to have missed. The ancient frog-worshippers who made 'em had to get the gold from somewhere, and the odds are it wasn't so very far away. Also it isn't likely that they used it all up. If I found the mother lode I'd have a real return on my investment."

A time came when she felt it would not be worth going any farther for any sort of wealth.

"We should be turning back," she said, with heroically simulated reluctance. "We ought to get back to the boat before dark."

The boat was an old 40-foot native hull on which some intermediate owner had built an oversize deckhouse and partitioned it into a crude kind of houseboat. It was cramped and dilapidated and none too clean, but it possessed screens on the windows and a primitive form of shower bath, and from her point of suffering it was starting to resemble a luxury yacht.

The Saint was staring fixedly at the river bank, and suddenly his arm and forefinger stretched out in a compelling gesture. "Look!" he said.

Her eyes turned where he pointed, and even she saw the metallic yellow gleams on a rock caught by the sun.

He picked up the chunk of stone and wiped it on his shirt. There were half a dozen kernels of the yellow metal embedded in it. He was able to pry one of

them out with the point of a pocket knife and lay it in the palm of her hand, a nugget the size of a small pea.

He looked around, and pointed to another rock, and another. All her wretchedness and exhaustion miraculously forgotten, she too began casting around and picked up other stones herself. She discovered that they were surrounded by a score and more of similar half-buried fragments, each crusted with the same crumbs of gold. She found herself grabbing them up wildly, trying to build a stack on one outspread hand and the arm held against her chest.

"Hey, take it easy," he said, as the top-heavy pile slipped and most of it spilled. "A couple of souvenirs is enough for now. We'll pick up some more when we come by in the boat, if you like."

"The boat isn't half *big* enough," she gasped distractedly.

He was laughing, an almost soundless laughter of celestial contentment. "Sweetheart, I'm not even thinking about what we could put in that boat. It's what can be taken out with dredges and draglines and strings of barges. This isn't something I'll have to work myself with a pick and shovel."

"Do you really think it's that big?"

"I know it. I know a lot about mining, among a number of things. This is what every prospector dreams of blundering into. This is the end of the rainbow. When you find this exact kind of geological set-up, you know that you haven't a thing to do but file your claim, form a company, and wait for the dividends!"

She trudged all the way back to the boat in a daze that nullified fatigue and time.

"This is one time when a long cold drink isn't going to be merely medicinal," he said. "This will be a legitimate celebration."

She managed to smile somehow. "I'd enjoy it lots more if I were clean," she said. "Will you save it for me?"

"You've got the best idea. Yell when you're through with the shower, and I'll get clean too. Then we'll make it a party."

What she wanted more than anything was a chance to gather her wits without the superimposed strain of maintaining a mask. But her usually agile mind seemed to have gone numb. Soap and water, brush and comb, perfume and lipstick, and lastly a minimum of fresh cool garments, made her feel physically better but for once were inadequate to restore her mentally. She was overwhelmed by the magnitude of a complication that had never entered her dizziest dreams.

Later, when he entered the forward section of the deckhouse,

which served as both wheelhouse and saloon, Simon Templar found her sitting at the table, her eyes fastened in a hypnotized way on one of the gold-studded pieces of rock which she had brought back.

"A lovely hunk of mineral, isn't it?" he remarked, as he went to work improvising lime and soda and ice with fortification from a bottle of Pimm's Cup which he had thoughtfully contributed to the ship's stores. "It's a shame you had those headhunters sniping at you the last time you went by there, or I'm sure the Professor would have spotted that formation."

"But what a wonderful break it was that we asked you to take our picture."

It was all she could think of to say, a forlorn attempt to be reassured that the foreboding that chilled her to the marrow was unfounded.

He set a tall tinkling glass in front of her, and raised its duplicate to the level of his own lips.

"Here's to Loro," he said, and drank.

He went on measuring her with a steady gaze, while he put his glass down and placed a cigarette in his mouth.

"Forgive me if I'm off the beam," he said, "but a moment ago it sounded just as if you were assuming that we were partners in a newly discovered gold mine."

"Aren't we?"

"I don't think it's exactly up to you to say that, darling. The only partnership deal we made was that I agreed to finance a highly speculative expedition to try and recover some golden frog idols, with the understanding that if we succeeded I could keep, say, half of them."

"But if I hadn't brought you here, you'd never have discovered this gold mine," she was hotheaded enough to argue.

"That's true," he said coolly. "And if I hadn't been in the bar at El Panamá I might never have met you—but does that mean the bartender is entitled to cut himself in? I'm a gambler, but I play percentages. I told you this afternoon, even before we found any gold, that it wasn't your frogs I was betting on, but the other angle, the possible gold mine, which I'd figured out all by myself. Maybe you could make me feel generous about that, but I'd be uncomfortable if I felt you were grabbing."

She looked at him speechlessly, and only the most Spartan self-discipline inhibited her from throwing her glass in his face.

He did not even appear to notice the gelid malevolence in her eyes, for through her self-inflicted silence his ear was caught and held by a new sound that had been trying to creep in through

the thin bulkheads and open screens. He raised a hand, his face suddenly tense and withdrawn.

"Do you hear that?" he asked; and a well-worn behavior pattern dragged her back rather like an automaton into the script that had been so catastrophically interrupted but which was supposed to be still unreeling itself with her help.

"The drums!" she breathed.

He thrust open the screen door and stepped out on to the scanty triangle of foredeck, and in a moment she followed him. The scrawny captain was already out there, standing rigidly in the bow, with a naked machete gleaming in his hand. Dusk had been falling when Simon and Alice reached the boat, and the brief twilight had long since passed, but now a full moon had risen above the trees and flooded the boat with a cold silver-green brilliance.

The river flowed past and under it like a torpidly undulant sheet of liquid lead, but the walls of jungle on each side were by contrast impenetrably black and solid except for the luminous dappling of their topmost foliage. And out of that huge formless obscurity came the monotonous menacing thump and titter of the drums, swelling and fading, shifting and drifting, muttering endless spells and abominations out of the unspeakable night. The tympani virtuosi of the nearby village, inspired by copious libations of Loro's rum, were truly floating it out.

"Sounds like a big fiesta for Loro," Simon said.

She clutched his arm, to make sure he would feel her shiver. "No, it's bad," she said shakily. "They never play those drums for fun. Only for a blood ritual, a head chopping. I've heard them before. I can never forget . . ."

"Bad," said the taciturn captain, in corroboration. *"Muy malo!"*

A single ear-splitting shriek pealed out of the blackness, hung quavering on a climax of agony, and was abruptly cut off.

"Oh, no," Alice sobbed. At the Saint's first movement, she clung to him tighter. "No, I won't let you. There's nothing you could do!"

Like a giant firefly, a torch blinked alight in the forest, flaring and eclipsing as it wandered among the trees. It was joined by another, and another, until there were six or seven of them shimmering and weaving towards the river, throwing weirdly moving silhouettes of deformed tree trunks and twisted jungle growth. The drums came nearer, picked up a more feverish tempo.

As the torches bobbed closer to the bank, they revealed not only the shapes of the brown men who carried them, but the gleaming leaping forms of a

horde of other naked creatures that writhed and capered around them. The male population of the village where Loro sojourned were no goldbrickers. He had explained to them that this was what the incomprehensible white tourists expected, and in return for the rum which he dispensed they were always ready to oblige. It was more fun for them than a square dance, anyway.

Then, as if at a signal, the torches drew together and became almost still. And in the midst of them, on the point of a spear, to an accompaniment of shrill yips and yells, was raised a bleeding human head.

This was Professor Humphrey Nestor's crowning inspiration, the climactic triumph of his dramatic genius. The head, molded in papier-maché from a plaster matrix which the Professor had made himself, was a recognizable enough facsimile of Loro's to pass at that distance and in the flickering torchlight, and the long black hair affixed to its scalp and the gold ring in one ear were clinchers of identification. The ketchup which dripped from its neck was a gruesome touch of realism which had become even more horrifyingly effective when some of the performers had discovered how good it tasted and had taken to dipping their fingers in the drips and licking them with ghoulish glee.

Thus the subsidizer of the whole elaborate fraud was to be fully and incontrovertibly convinced that Loro was dead, the guns were lost, the expedition had failed, and there was nothing left but to kiss his investment good-bye and be thankful his own head was still on his shoulders. At that, he would go home with an anecdote to embroider for the rest of his life which, in itself was almost worth the capital outlay, which he could take as a tax deduction, if he could get anyone to believe him.

Alice screamed.

All the torches went out as if a switch had been pulled. It had been found too dangerous to leave them alight any longer than it took to fulfill their purpose. One earlier victim had been so emotionally affected that he had fetched a gun and started blazing away, and might easily have hurt someone.

Out of the darker darkness that seemed to swallow the land again came a rustle like unseen wings, and a shower of arrows plonked into the bulkheads and the deck. They were shot by the best archers in the village, who could be relied on not to hit anyone accidentally.

The captain let out a yell of fear, and his machete flashed, cutting the bow rope by which they were moored with a single stroke. Instantly the boat started to move with the strong deep current. The captain scuttled into

the wheelhouse, and as Simon instinctively dragged Alice down to the deck they heard the labored grinding of the electric starter. The air quivered with bloodcurdling ululations from the stygian shoreline.

After four excruciating attempts the engine finally caught and the boat came under control, turning with increasing sureness out towards the center of the river. Another shower of arrows fell mostly in the water behind them, and the hysterical warwhoops faded rapidly as the boat gathered speed with the stream.

Simon rose and helped Alice up, and sympathetically let her continue to hold on to him since that was what she seemed to want.

"It's all my fault," she moaned. "I got Loro killed, and lost you all that money—"

"Loro got himself killed," said the Saint sternly. "It was his own idea, and he was sure he could get away with it. Nobody was twisting his arm. As for the money, I don't know what you think I've got to complain about."

She had to force herself to recall how radically inappropriate half of her carefully rehearsed speech had become in the light of the veritable catastrophe which had intervened.

The boat, driving at full throttle down the stream which the climbing moon had turned into a floodlit highway, must already have been somewhere near the place which they had reached so laboriously that afternoon on foot. Simon pointed towards the now silent blackness of the land.

"I'm not an archaeologist, and I'll be satisfied with what's there," he said. "I'll be back with all the machinery that's necessary to get it out, and all the men that are needed—armed, if they have to be—to chase those headhunters away. Before long, the headhunters will probably have been scared so far off into the hills that you won't have any trouble getting back into your frog cave. I'll get along all right until then. I've still got that prospecting concession for this river —remember?"

V

"It was, literally, like an answer to prayer," said Professor Humphrey Nestor piously. "As you know, Mr. Tombs—I'm sure I must have mentioned it—I was scheduled to stop over to deliver a special lecture on Inca mythology at the University of Miami. So I had asked Michigan to forward my mail for a few days in care of the President. That is how I happened to receive there this letter from the executors of this rich uncle from whom I frankly never expected to inherit so much as an old encyclopedia."

He handed Simon the unfold-

ed letter. It was nicely typed on a letterhead purporting to be that of a firm of New York attorneys, and informed Professor Humphrey Nestor that they were holding at his disposal a legacy of $50,000 from the estate of Hannibal Nestor, deceased, and would appreciate his instructions regarding delivery of the same.

Simon glanced at it and handed it back with a smile of congratulation. Nobody could esteem the value of an efficiently faked document higher than he.

"That's simply wonderful," he said whole-heartedly.

"Naturally," said the Professor, "all I could think of was to get the money as quickly as possible and return here while we were still hot on the scent, as you might say, of those golden frogs."

"Naturally."

"Getting the money was only a matter of formality. Then I wired Alice, and took the next plane back here after my lecture. Of course, by that time you had already left on your ill-fated trip. No doubt you can imagine my feelings when she was forced to tell me the whole story. It would be impossible for me to forgive the bargain she made with you if I did not realize how altruistic although misguided her motives were. But both of us will always bear on our souls the burden of the death of poor faithful Loro."

He bowed his head; and a subdued Alice, becomingly garbed in black, meekly followed suit.

"Don't blame yourselves too much," said the Saint. "I've already told her—"

The Professor raised his hand. "Let us not discuss it," he said. "All I ask, for my own satisfaction and peace of mind, is that you should permit me to reimburse you for your loss. Call it conscience money, or blood money, as you will. And let us consider that iniquitous compact ended, as if it had never been made."

He took another piece of paper from his pocket and held it out to the Saint. Simon took it, and saw that it was a cashier's check for $10,000 which his practiced eye told him was certainly not forged.

"If you put it that way, Professor," he said, respectfully, "I hardly see how I can refuse."

"I understand you will not be a loser, in any event. May I ask what you are proposing to do about your lucky find?"

"I haven't had time to do anything much yet," said the Saint. "In fact, for the present I'm keeping it right under my hat, and as you know I've asked Alice to do the same. I don't want some local hotshots getting wind of it and maybe pulling some fast legal shenanigans before everything's sewn up.

"I have got an attorney busy forming a local corporation,

which will have quite a nominal capital, most of which I'll put up myself—about a hundred grand. For operating capital, I'll get a loan from some Texas oil men I know; in that way, the value of the original stock will skyrocket much faster as soon as we get going, and I can take a nice capital gain instead of paying a ninety percent income tax."

The Professor nodded. "Alice tells me she had some misunderstanding with you about the legal and moral rights to your mining claim. She was absolutely wrong, of course—"

"I know it now," Alice said contritely. "I was very stupid, and I apologize."

"But," said the Professor, "we do have a friendly interest in your venture. Your opening up of the country should eventually make it possible for us to get back to our frogs again—if they are still there. And I do claim that we contributed something, however indirectly, to your good fortune. Here I am, Mr. Tombs, with what is left of this legacy, and very little knowledge of financial matters.

"I would like to invest in something that would bring in a good return and enable me to continue my researches. Alice and I have been so close to this, and we have the best reasons to believe in it. I would like to ask you—not as a right, but as a favor—if you would consider letting us in on the ground floor."

"How much would you want to invest?" Simon asked in a businesslike manner.

The Professor looked appealingly at Alice. She opened her purse, and then a billfold from it, and took out five cashier's checks, each made out simply to Bearer. It was the most liquid and compact way she had been able to think of to carry her retirement fund. She put one of them back, and handed Simon the other four. Each of them was made out for $5,000.

"I told him we could speculate this much," she said.

Simon looked at them judicially. "I was only a little peeved because I thought Alice was jumping the gun," he said. "When you put it this way, I couldn't be mean enough to refuse. But I can't take all this—it would be against a foolish principle of mine."

He gave her back two of the checks and put the other two away in his wallet. "I'll give you a receipt," he said.

He fetched a sheet of paper and wrote on it:

Received from Professor Humphrey Nestor, and Alice Nestor, the sum of $10,000 (Ten Thousand Dollars) in return for which I promise to issue them stock to the same

par value in the Golden Frog Mining Corporation, as soon as it is available.

Probably, he reflected, a smart lawyer could prove that such an indefinite promise was not even fraudulent. Not that the Saint intended to wait around even another ten or twelve hours to find out.

"Will that do?" he asked.

They looked pathetically grateful and yet somewhat disappointed, so that he rather regretted the quixotic impulse that had compelled him to refuse half their money. But he felt that he had been well repaid for the time he had spent preparing that elegant "license" for himself.

As for the preliminary trip over the river, on which his Navy friend had flown him from Coco Solo and helped him dump several sackfuls of carefully salted rock, the plane and the gas had been unwittingly supplied by Uncle Sam, and the trip had been purely a joyride.

The Nestors, he thought, should be taught a lesson to be more circumspect about working a routine with so many transparent fabrications in it, but they had certainly put on a first-class production, and the Saint did not want to be too cruel.

Among the Contributors to Next Month's SAINT *will be*

LESLIE CHARTERIS, *with* "The Mixture As Before"

FRANK GRUBER, *with* "Murder at the Race Track"

RAY BRADBURY, *with* "The Screaming Woman"

T. S. STRIBLING, *with* "The Case of the Button"

EDMUND CRISPIN, *with* "The Unloaded Gun"

H. C. McNEILE, *with* "Bulldog Drummond at Lonely Inn"

and many others

johnny one eye

by . . . Damon Runyon

Johnny One-Eye was tiny, and the killer was big and mean. But in an old dark house the smallest of kittens may be a killer's nemesis.

THIS CAT I am going to tell you about is a very small cat, and in fact it is only a few weeks old, consequently it is really nothing but an infant cat. To tell the truth, it is just a kitten.

It is gray and white and very dirty and its fur is all frowzled up, so it is a very miserable-looking little kitten to be sure the day it crawls through a broken basement window into an old house in East Fifty-third Street over near Third Avenue in the City of New York. It goes from room to room saying merouw, merouw in a low, weak voice until it comes to a room at the head of the stairs on the second story where a guy by the name of Rudolph is sitting on the floor thinking of not much.

One reason Rudolph is sitting on the floor is because there is nothing else to sit on as this is an empty house that is all boarded up for years and there is no furniture whatever in it, and another reason is that Rudolph has a .38 slug in his side and really does not feel like doing much of anything but sitting.

Even though Damon Runyon wrote detective stories only occasionally we doubt if there's a dyed-in-the-wool mystery fan in America who hasn't glanced up from his morning paper to remember him, and fill the chair opposite with an imaginary doll or guy. And we can safely conjecture why. It was because life itself was to him the most fascinating of mysteries and could provide — in a story like this — extraordinary insights into crime.

Copyright, 1941, by the Crowell-Collier Pub. Co.

He is wearing a derby hat and his overcoat as it is in the wintertime and very cold and he has an automatic Betsy on the floor beside him and naturally he is surprised quite some when the little kitten comes merouwing into the room and he picks up the Betsy and points it at the door in case anyone he does not wish to see is with the kitten. But when he observes that it is all alone, Rudolph puts the Betsy down again and speaks to the kitten as follows:

"Hello, cat," he says.

Of course the kitten does not say anything in reply except merouw but it walks right up to Rudolph and climbs on his lap, although the chances are if it knows who Rudolph is it will hightail it out of there quicker than anybody can say scat. There is enough daylight coming through the chinks in the boards over the windows for Rudolph to see that the kitten's right eye is in bad shape, and in fact it is bulged half out of its head in a most distressing manner.

It is also plain to be seen that the injury happened recently and Rudolph gazes at the kitten a while and starts to laugh and says like this:

"Well, cat," he says, "you seem to be scuffed up almost as much as I am. We make a fine pair of invalids here together. What is your name, cat?"

Naturally the kitten does not state its name but only goes merouw and Rudolph says, "All right, I will call you Johnny. Yes," he says, "your tag is now Johnny One-Eye."

Then he puts the kitten in under his overcoat and pretty soon it gets warm and starts to purr and Rudolph says:

"Johnny," he says, "I will say one thing for you and that is you are plenty game to be able to sing when you are hurt as bad as you are. It is more than I can do."

But Johnny only goes merouw again and keeps on purring and by and by it falls sound asleep under Rudolph's coat and Rudolph is wishing the pain in his side will let up long enough for him to do the same.

Well, I suppose you are saying to yourself, what is this Rudolph doing in an old empty house with a slug in his side, so I will explain that the district attorney is responsible for this situation. It seems that the D.A. appears before the grand jury and tells it that Rudolph is an extortion guy and a killer and I do not know what all else, though some of these statements are without doubt a great injustice to Rudolph as, up to the time the D.A. makes them, Rudolph does not kill anybody of any consequence in years.

It is true that at one period of his life he is considered a little wild but this is in the twenties when everybody else is, too, and

for seven or eight years he is all settled down and is engaged in business organization work, which is very respectable work, indeed. He organizes quite a number of businesses on a large scale and is doing very good for himself.

He is living quietly in a big hotel all alone, as Rudolph is by no means a family guy, and he is highly spoken of by one and all when the D.A. starts poking his nose into his affairs. It is the D.A.'s claim that Rudolph has no right to be making money out of the businesses, even though Rudolph gives these businesses plenty of first-class protection.

In fact, the D.A. claims that Rudolph is nothing but a racket guy and a great knock to the community, and all this upsets Rudolph no little when it comes to his ears in a roundabout way. So he calls up his lawbooks and requests legal advice on the subject and lawbooks says the best thing he can think of for Rudolph to do is to become as inconspicuous as possible right away but to please not mention to anyone that he gives this advice.

Lawbooks says he understands the D.A. is requesting indictments and is likely to get them and furthermore that he is rounding up certain parties that Rudolph is once associated with and trying to get them to remember incidents in Rudolph's early career that may not be entirely to his credit.

Lawbooks says he hears that one of these parties is a guy by the name of Cute Freddy and that Freddy makes a deal with the D.A. to lay off of him if he tells everything he knows about Rudolph, so under the circumstances a long journey by Rudolph will be in the interest of everybody concerned.

So Rudolph decides to go on a journey but then he gets to thinking that maybe Freddy will remember a little matter that Rudolph long since dismisses from his mind and does not wish to have recalled again, which is the time he and Freddy do a job on a guy by the name of The Icelander in Troy years ago and he drops around to Freddy's house to remind him to be sure not to remember this.

But it seems that Freddy, who is an important guy in business organization himself, though in a different part of the city than Rudolph's, mistakes the purpose of Rudolph's visit and starts to out with his rooty-toot-toot and in order to protect himself it is necessary for Rudolph to take his Betsy and give Freddy a little tattooing. In fact, Rudolph practically crochets his monogram on Freddy's chest and leaves him exceptionally deceased.

But as Rudolph is departing from the neighborhood, who bobs up but a young guy by the

name of Buttsy Fagan, who works for Freddy as a chauffeur and one thing and another, and who is also said to be able to put a slug through a keyhole at forty paces without touching the sides, though I suppose it will have to be a pretty good-sized keyhole.

Anyway, he takes a long-distance crack at Rudolph as Rudolph is rounding a corner but all Buttsy can see of Rudolph at the moment is a little piece of his left side and this is what Buttsy hits, although no one knows it at the time, except of course Rudolph, who just keeps on departing.

Now this incident causes quite a stir in police circles and the D.A. is very indignant over losing a valuable witness and when they are unable to locate Rudolph at once, a reward of five thousand dollars is offered for information leading to his capture alive or dead and some think they really mean dead.

Indeed, it is publicly stated that it is not a good idea for anyone to take any chances with Rudolph as he is known to be armed and is such a character as will be sure to resent being captured. But they do not explain that this is only because Rudolph knows the D.A. wishes to place him in the old rocking chair at Sing Sing and Rudolph is quite allergic to the idea.

Anyway, the cops go looking for Rudolph in Hot Springs and Miami and every other place except where he is, which is right in New York wandering around town with the slug in his side, knocking at the doors of old friends requesting assistance. But all the old friends do for him is to slam the doors in his face and forget they ever see him, as the D.A. is very tough on parties who assist guys he is looking for, claiming that this is something most illegal called harboring fugitives. Besides Rudolph is never any too popular at best with his friends as he always plays pretty much of a lone duke and takes the big end of everything for his.

He cannot even consult a doctor about the slug in his side as he knows that nowadays the first thing a doctor will do about a guy with a gunshot wound is to report him to the cops, although Rudolph can remember when there is always a sure-footed doctor around who will consider it a privilege and a pleasure to treat him and keep his trap closed about it.

But of course this is in the good old days and Rudolph can see they are gone forever. So he just does the best he can about the slug and goes on wandering here and there and around and about and the blats keep printing his picture and saying, where is Rudolph?

Where he is some of the time is in Central Park trying to get

some sleep, but of course even the blats will consider it foolish to go looking for Rudolph there in such cold weather, as he is known as a guy who enjoys his comfort at all times. In fact, it is comfort that Rudolph misses more than anything as the slug is commencing to cause him great pain and naturally the pain turns Rudolph's thoughts to the author of same and he remembers that he once hears somebody say that Buttsy lives over in East Fifty-third Street.

So one night Rudolph decides to look Buttsy up and cause him a little pain in return and he is moseying through Fifty-third when he gets so weak he falls down on the sidewalk in front of the old house and rolls down a short flight of steps that lead from the street level to a little railed-in areaway and ground floor or basement door and before he stops rolling he brings up against the door itself and it creaks open inward as he bumps it. After he lays there a while Rudolph can see that the house is empty and he crawls on inside.

Then when he feels stronger, Rudolph makes his way upstairs because the basement is damp and mice keep trotting back and forth over him and eventually he winds up in the room where Johnny One-Eye finds him the following afternoon and the reason Rudolph settles down in this room is because it commands the stairs.

Naturally, this is important to a guy in Rudolph's situation, though after he is sitting there for about fourteen hours before Johnny comes along he can see that he is not going to be much disturbed by traffic. But he considers it a very fine place, indeed, to remain planted until he is able to resume his search for Buttsy.

Well, after a while Johnny One-Eye wakes up and comes from under the coat and looks at Rudolph out of his good eye and Rudolph waggles his fingers and Johnny plays with them, catching one finger in his front paws and biting it gently and this pleases Rudolph no little as he never before has any personal experience with a kitten.

However, he remembers observing one when he is a boy down in Houston Street, so he takes a piece of paper out of his pocket and makes a little ball of it and rolls it along the floor and Johnny bounces after it very lively indeed. But Rudolph can see that the bad eye is getting worse and finally he says to Johnny like this:

"Johnny," he says, "I guess you must be suffering more than I am. I remember there are some pet shops over on Lexington Avenue not far from here and when it gets good and dark I am going to take you out and see if we can find a cat croaker to do some-

thing about your eye. Yes, Johnny," Rudolph says, "I will also get you something to eat. You must be starved."

Johnny One-Eye says merouw to this and keeps on playing with the paper ball but soon it comes on dark outside and inside, too, and in fact, it is so dark inside that Rudolph cannot see his hand before him. Then he puts his Betsy in a side pocket of his overcoat and picks up Johnny and goes downstairs, feeling his way in the dark and easing along a step at a time until he gets to the basement door. Naturally, Rudolph does not wish to strike any matches because he is afraid someone outside may see the light and get nosey.

By moving very slowly, Rudolph finally gets to Lexington Avenue and while he is going along he remembers the time he walks from 125th Street in Harlem down to 110th with six slugs in him and never feels as bad as he does now. He gets to thinking that maybe he is not the guy he used to be, which, of course, is very true as Rudolph is now forty-odd years of age and is fat around the middle and getting bald, and he also does some thinking about what a pleasure it will be to him to find this Buttsy and cause him the pain he is personally suffering.

There are not many people in the streets and those that are go hurrying along because it is so cold and none of them pay any attention to Rudolph or Johnny One-Eye either, even though Rudolph staggers a little now and then like a guy who is rummed up, although of course it is only weakness.

The chances are he is also getting a little feverish and lightheaded because finally he stops a cop who is going along swinging his arms to keep warm and asks him if he knows where there is a pet shop and it is really most indiscreet of such a guy as Rudolph to be interviewing cops. But the cop just points up the street and goes on without looking twice at Rudolph and Rudolph laughs and pokes Johnny with a finger and says:

"No, Johnny One-Eye," he says, "the cop is not a dope for not recognizing Rudolph. Who can figure the hottest guy in forty-eight states to be going along a street with a little cat in his arms? Can you, Johnny?"

Johnny says merouw and pretty soon Rudolph comes to the pet shop the cop points out. Rudolph goes inside and says to the guy like this:

"Are you a cat croaker?" Rudolph says. "Do you know what to do about a little cat that has a hurt eye?"

"I am a kind of a vet," the guy says.

"Then take a glaum of Johnny One-Eye here and see what you can do for him," Rudolph says.

Then he hands Johnny over to the guy and the guy looks at Johnny a while and says:

"Mister, the best thing I can do for this cat is to put it out of its misery. You better let me give it something right now. It will just go to sleep and never know what happens."

Well, at this, Rudolph grabs Johnny One-Eye out of the guy's hands and puts him under his coat and drops a duke on the Betsy in his pocket as if he is afraid the guy will take Johnny away from him again and he says to the guy like this:

"No, no, no," Rudolph says, "I cannot bear to think of such a thing. What about some kind of an operation? I remember they take a bum lamp out of Joe the Goat at Bellevue one time and he is okay now."

"Nothing will do your cat any good," the guy says. "It is a goner. It will start having fits pretty soon and die sure. What is the idea of trying to save such a cat as this? It is no kind of a cat to begin with. It is just a cat. You can get a million like it for a nickel."

"No," Rudolph says, "this is not just a cat. This is Johnny One-Eye. He is my only friend in the world. He is the only living thing that ever comes pushing up against me warm and friendly and trusts me in my whole life. I feel sorry for him."

"I feel sorry for him, too," the guy says. "I always feel sorry for animals that get hurt and for people."

"I do not feel sorry for people," Rudolph says. "I only feel sorry for Johnny One-Eye. Give me some kind of stuff that Johnny will eat."

"Your cat wants milk," the guy says. "You can get some at the delicatessen store down at the corner. Mister," he says, "you look sick yourself. Can I do anything for you?"

But Rudolph only shakes his head and goes on out and down to the delicatessen joint where he buys a bottle of milk and this transaction reminds him that he is very short in the moo department. In fact, he can find only a five-dollar note in his pockets and he remembers that he has no way of getting any more when this runs out, which is a very sad predicament indeed for a guy who is accustomed to plenty of moo at all times.

Then Rudolph returns to the old house and sits down on the floor again and gives Johnny One-Eye some of the milk in his derby hat as he neglects buying something for Johnny to drink out of. But Johnny offers no complaint. He laps up the milk and curls himself into a wad in Rudolph's lap and purrs.

Rudolph takes a swig of the milk himself but it makes him sick for by this time Rudolph is really far from being in the pink

of condition. He not only has the pain in his side but he has a heavy cold which he probably catches from lying on the basement floor or maybe sleeping in the park and he is wheezing no little. He commences to worry that he may get too ill to continue looking for Buttsy, as he can see that if it is not for Buttsy he will not be in this situation, suffering the way he is, but on a long journey to some place.

He takes to going off into long stretches of a kind of stupor and every time he comes out of one of these stupors the first thing he does is to look around for Johnny One-Eye and Johnny is always right there either playing with the paper ball or purring in Rudolph's lap. He is a great comfort to Rudolph but after a while Rudolph notices that Johnny seems to be running out of zip and he also notices that he is running out of zip himself especially when he discovers that he is no longer able to get to his feet.

It is along in the late afternoon of the day following the night Rudolph goes out of the house that he hears someone coming up the stairs and naturally he picks up his Betsy and gets ready for action when he also hears a very small voice calling kitty, kitty, kitty, and he realizes that the party that is coming can be nobody but a child. In fact, a minute later a little pretty of maybe six years of age comes into the room all out of breath and says to Rudolph like this: "How do you do?" she says. "Have you seen my kitty?"

Then she spots Johnny One-Eye in Rudolph's lap and runs over and sits down beside Rudolph and takes Johnny in her arms and at first Rudolph is inclined to resent this and has a notion to give her a good boffing but he is too weak to exert himself in such a manner.

"Who are you?" Rudolph says to the little pretty, "and," he says, "where do you live and how do you get in this house?"

"Why," she says, "I am Elsie, and I live down the street and I am looking everywhere for my kitty for three days and the door is open downstairs and I know kitty likes to go in doors that are open so I came to find her and here she is."

"I guess I forgot to close it last night," Rudolph says. "I seem to be very forgetful lately."

"What is your name?" Elsie asks, "and why are you sitting on the floor in the cold and where are all your chairs? Do you have any little girls like me and do you love them dearly?"

"No," Rudolph says. "By no means and not at all."

"Well," Elsie says, "I think you are a nice man for taking care of my kitty. Do you love kitty?"

"Look," Rudolph says, "his

name is not kitty. His name is Johnny One-Eye, because he has only one eye."

"I call her kitty," Elsie says. "But," she says, "Johnny One-Eye is a nice name too and if you like it best I will call her Johnny and I will leave her here with you to take care of always and I will come to see her every day. You see," she says, "if I take Johnny home Buttsy will only kick her again."

"Buttsy?" Rudolph says. "Do I hear you say Buttsy? Is his other name Fagan?"

"Why, yes," Elsie says. "Do you know him?"

"No," Rudolph says, "but I hear of him. What is he to you?"

"He is my new daddy," Elsie says. "My other one and my best one is dead and so my mamma makes Buttsy my new one. My mamma says Buttsy is her mistake. He is very mean. He kicks Johnny and hurts her eye and makes her run away. He kicks my mamma too. Buttsy kicks everybody and everything when he is mad and he is always mad."

"He is a louse to kick a little cat," Rudolph says.

"Yes," Elsie says, "that is what Mr. O'Toole says he is for kicking my mamma but my mamma says it is not a nice word and I am never to say it out loud."

"Who is Mr. O'Toole?" Rudolph says.

"He is the policeman," Elsie says. "He lives across the street from us and he is very nice to me. He says Buttsy is the word you say just now, not only for kicking my mamma but for taking her money when she brings it home from work and spending it so she cannot buy me nice things to wear. But do you know what?" Elsie says, "my mamma says some day Buttsy is going far away and then she will buy me lots of things and send me to school and make me a lady."

Then Elsie begins skipping around the room with Johnny One-Eye in her arms and singing, "I am going to be a lady, I am going to be a lady," until Rudolph has to tell her to pipe down because he is afraid somebody may hear her. And all the time Rudolph is thinking of Buttsy and regretting that he is unable to get on his pins and go out of the house.

"Now I must go home," Elsie says, "because this is a night Buttsy comes in for his supper and I have to be in bed before he gets there so I will not bother him. Buttsy does not like little girls. Buttsy does not like little kittens. Buttsy does not like little anythings. My mamma is afraid of Buttsy and so am I. But," she says, "I will leave Johnny here with you and come back tomorrow to see her."

"Listen, Elsie," Rudolph says, "does Mr. O'Toole come home

tonight to his house for his supper, too?"

"Oh, yes," Elsie says. "He comes home every night. Sometimes when there is a night Buttsy is not coming in for his supper my mamma lets me go over to Mr. O'Toole's and I play with his dog Charley but you must never tell Buttsy this because he does not like O'Toole, either. But this is a night Buttsy is coming and that is why my mamma tells me to get in early."

Now Rudolph takes an old letter out of his inside pocket and a pencil out of another pocket and he scribbles a few lines on the envelope and stretches himself out on the floor and begins groaning, "Oh, oh, oh," and then he says to Elsie like this:

"Look, Elsie," he says, "you are a smart little kid and you pay strict attention to what I am going to say to you. Do not go to bed tonight until Buttsy gets in. Then," Rudolph says, "you tell him you come in this old house looking for your cat and that you hear somebody groaning like I do just now in the room at the head of the stairs and that you find a guy who says his name is Rudolph lying on the floor so sick he cannot move. Tell him the front door of the basement is open. But," Rudolph says, "you must not tell him that Rudolph tells you to say these things. Do you understand?"

"Oh," Elsie says, "do you want him to come here? He will kick Johnny again if he does."

"He will come here, but he will not kick Johnny," Rudolph says. "He will come here, or I am the worst guesser in the world. Tell him what I look like, Elsie. Maybe he will ask you if you see a gun. Tell him you do not see one. You do not see a gun, do you, Elsie?"

"No," Elsie says, "only the one in your hand when I come in but you put it under your coat. Buttsy has a gun and Mr. O'Toole has a gun but Buttsy says I am never, never to tell anybody about this or he will kick me the way he does my mamma."

"Well," Rudolph says, "you must not remember seeing mine, either. It is a secret between you and me and Johnny One-Eye. Now," he says, "if Buttsy leaves the house to come and see me, as I am pretty sure he will, you run over to Mr. O'Toole's house and give him this note, but do not tell Buttsy or your mamma either about the note. If Buttsy does not leave, it is my hard luck but you give the note to Mr. O'Toole anyway. Now tell me what you are to do, Elsie," Rudolph says, "so I can see if you have got everything correct."

"I am to go on home and wait for Buttsy," she says, "and I am to tell him Rudolph is lying on the floor of this dirty old house with a fat stomach and a big nose making noises and that he is very

sick and the basement door is open and there is no gun if he asks me, and when Buttsy comes to see you I am to take this note to Mr. O'Toole. But Buttsy and my mamma are not to know I have the note and if Buttsy does not leave I am to give it to Mr. O'Toole anyway and you are to stay here and take care of Johnny my kitten."

"That is swell," Rudolph says. "Now you run along."

So Elsie leaves and Rudolph sits up again against the wall because his side feels easier this way and Johnny One-Eye is in his lap purring very low and the dark comes on until it is blacker inside the room than in the middle of a tunnel and Rudolph feels that he is going into another stupor and he has a tough time fighting it off.

Afterward some of the neighbors claim they remember hearing a shot inside the house and then two more in quick succession and then all is quiet until a little later when Officer O'Toole and half a dozen other cops and an ambulance with a doctor come busting into the street and swarm into the joint with their guns out and their flashlights going. The first thing they find is Buttsy at the foot of the stairs with two bullet wounds close together in his throat, and naturally he is dead.

Rudolph is still sitting against the wall with what seems to be a small bundle of bloody fur in his lap but which turns out to be what is left of this little cat I am telling you about, although nobody pays any attention to it at first. They are more interested in getting the come-alongs on Rudolph's wrists but before they move him he pulls his clothes aside and shows the doctor where the slug is in his side and the doctor takes one glaum and shakes his head and says:

"Gangrene," he says. "I think you have pneumonia, too, from the way you are blowing."

"I know," Rudolph says. "I know this morning. Not much chance, hey, croaker?"

"Not much," the doctor says.

"Well, cops," Rudolph says, "load me in. I do not suppose you want Johnny, seeing that he is dead."

"Johnny who?" one of the cops say.

"Johnny One-Eye," Rudolph says. "This little cat here in my lap. Buttsy shoots Johnny's only good eye out and takes most of his noodle with it. I never see a more wonderful shot. Well, Johnny is better off but I feel sorry about him as he is my best friend down to the last."

Then he begins to laugh and the cop asks him what tickles him so much and Rudolph says:

"Oh," he says, "I am thinking of the joke on Buttsy. I am positive he will come looking for me, all right, not only because

of the little altercation between Cute Freddy and me but because the chances are Buttsy is greatly embarrassed by not tilting me over the first time, as of course he never knows he wings me. Furthermore," Rudolph says, "and this is the best reason of all, Buttsy will realize that if I am in his neighborhood it is by no means a good sign for him, even if he hears I am sick.

"Well," Rudolph says, "I figure that with any kind of a square rattle I will have a better chance of nailing him than he has of nailing me, but that even if he happens to nail me, O'Toole will get my note in time to arrive here and nab Buttsy on the spot with his gun on him. And," Rudolph says, "I know it will be a great pleasure to the D.A. to settle Buttsy for having a gun on him.

"But," Rudolph says, "as soon as I hear Buttsy coming on the sneak up the stairs, I can see I am taking all the worst of it because I am now wheezing like a busted valve and you can hear me a block away except when I hold my breath, which is very difficult indeed, considering the way I am already greatly tuckered out. No," Rudolph says, "it does not look any too good for me as Buttsy keeps coming up the stairs, as I can tell he is doing by a little faint creak in the boards now and then.

"I am in no shape to maneuver around the room and pretty soon he will be on the landing and then all he will have to do is to wait there until he hears me which he is bound to do unless I stop breathing altogether. Naturally," Rudolph says, "I do not care to risk a blast in the dark without knowing where he is as something tells me Buttsy is not a guy you can miss in safety.

"Well," Rudolph says, "I notice several times before this that in the dark Johnny One-Eye's good glim shines like a big spark, so when I feel Buttsy is about to hit the landing, although of course I cannot see him, I flip Johnny's ball of paper across the room to the wall just opposite the door and tough as he must be feeling Johnny chases after it when he hears it light.

"I figure Buttsy will hear Johnny playing with the paper and see his eye shining and think it is me and take a pop at it and that his gun flash will give me a crack at him.

"It all works out just like I dope it," Rudolph says, "but I never give Buttsy credit for being such a marksman as to be able to hit a cat's eye in the dark. If I know this, maybe I will never stick Johnny out in front the way I do. It is a good thing I never give Buttsy a second shot. He is a lily. Yes," Rudolph says, "I can remember when I can use a guy like him."

"Buttsy is no account," the cop says. "He is a good riddance. He

is the makings of a worse guy than you."

"Well," Rudolph says, "it is a good lesson to him for kicking a little cat."

Then they take Rudolph to a hospital and this is where I see him and piece out this story of Johnny One-Eye, and Officer O'Toole is at Rudolph's bedside keeping guard over him, and I remember that not long before Rudolph chalks out he looks at O'Toole and says to him like this:

"Copper," he says, "there is no chance of them out-juggling the kid on the reward moo, is there?"

"No," O'Toole says, "no chance. I keep the note you send me by Elsie saying she will tell me where you are. It is information leading to your capture just as the reward offer states. Rudolph," he says, "it is a nice thing you do for Elsie and her mother, although," he says, "it is not nearly as nice as icing Buttsy for them."

"By the way, copper," Rudolph says, "there is the remainders of a pound note in my pants pocket when I am brought here. I want you to do me a favor. Get it from the desk and buy Elsie another cat and name it Johnny, will you?"

"Sure," O'Toole says. "Anything else?"

"Yes," Rudolph says, "be sure it has two good eyes."

MURDER AT THE RACE TRACK

By FRANK GRUBER

Johnny Fletcher could sell books anywhere. Putting on a tremendous act was second nature to him, and it's not surprising that his first appearance in a Frank Gruber novel skyrocketed its author to fame. Mystery novels featuring Johnny have hit the best-seller lists more than once. But if you'd like a turfside seat at Johnny's very latest performance, in a story brand new, we urge you not to miss MURDER AT THE RACETRACK *in our very next issue. It's as hard-hitting and fast-clocked a non-formula crime novel as Gruber has ever wrapped up for delivery in one package to the entertainment circuit. So here's to a horse called Anxious Betty and a corpse in the stalls.*

the hampstead murder

by . . . Christopher Bush

Prentisse truly loved his wife and wished with all his heart to see her happy. If only Death wouldn't stand at his elbow!

IT CAN BE an absorbing undertaking, when the means are available, to trace to their original sources events which have proved momentous and to discover how trivial were the small beginnings that set them in motion. Even the hydrogen bomb can be traced directly back to a murder in Serajevo. All our lives are shot through with the most incredible of coincidences. You happen to change the direction of a walk and you meet someone who changes the direction of your life.

The Hampstead Murder was a case in point. A man in Scotland wrote a letter to *The Times* and, by chance, *The Times* found it interesting enough to print. Because of that letter, which had nothing whatever to do with murder, a woman was strangled in a London suburb. You may not recall that murder. It created no excitement and never got into the headlines. The woman was found with the noose around her neck, and the killing could have been accomplished in

When great oaks from tiny acorns grow the tangled roots may coil around a restless corpse and send shivers up the entire tree. Here, in what well may be a unique departure in the annals of fictional crime—an accidental *murder—the tiny mainsprings of a man's good intentions embrace death in much the same spine-congealing fashion. Christopher Bush's first novel,* THE PERFECT CRIME, *was a best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic. He has since become one of the most consistently adroit and resourceful of English mystery writers.*

a matter of seconds. As murders go, it was exceptionally swift and abrupt.

Considering its ownership there was nothing unusual about the room where she was found. It smelled faintly of pot-pourri, and its charming furniture included some delightful period pieces. Its china and pictures had quality, its carpet was Chinese and its chairs were Chesterfield-soft and seductive.

Then there was the woman, in a charming afternoon frock, with a face like a surprised Madonna and hair like an aureola. She was wearing about a thousand pounds' worth of jewelry, which would unquestionably have proved tempting, in short, to a burglar. There was no blood, no signs of a struggle. No vulgarity, but everything quiet and restrained, except for that deadly circle around her neck. Even the murderer was only a part of that general background—a quiet man, writing peacefully at a Queen Anne bureau.

Later, of course, there was to be the comparative vulgarity of a trial, even if it ended in a matter of minutes with the knowledge that the murderer was hopelessly insane. And the reason of it all—let me repeat—was a letter that was written to *The Times*.

To get to that letter we must leave the charm of that drawing-room in Hampstead and come nearer town to Porter Street, Mornington Crescent. In Victorian times the Crescent had had dignity and aloofness. Porter Street still retained something of that dignity even if its Georgian houses had become offices and flats. It was in one of those flats that Lutley Prentisse was working on a certain June morning.

It would be more true to say that he should have been working. In front of his swivel chair were table and typewriter but he sat there with the tips of his fingers together and his brow wrinkled in thought. You would have needed no particular shrewdness to have guessed that he was a writer.

But he was a writer with a difference. His name was far from well-known. He had three novels to his credit, two having as their theme extra-marital intrigue and the other concerned with one of those coteries to be found on the French Riviera. The last only had sold quite well —a matter of gratification to its author purely from pride of workmanship. Money is always useful, but his private income was about two thousand a year after taxes, and the handsome royalties he received from his publisher made no great difference.

The fact of the matter was that he had drifted into writing almost without knowing it, and primarily to escape from bore-

dom. The first two years after his marriage had been a routine of which he had tired—Switzerland in mid-winter, the Riviera in Spring, golf in England in the summer and week-ends at various house parties, with a week or two at Deauville or Le Touquet in early autumn. After that, town—the club, theaters and the multitudinous rush and jigsaw fitting-in from morning till night.

All that was the life that suited Dorothy Prentisse so well. At golf Lutley was a shaky sixteen. She could give a low handicap man a good game and from the men's tees at that. Her tennis was almost first-class. She played a really good hand at bridge—a bit aggressive, perhaps, but rarely a loser unless cards and partners were impossible. Lutley was a cautious bidder if ever there was one. He was good, however, for what he said, and never less.

But he took things less seriously. In golf the game counted, not the figures—or at least that was how things had been before his marriage. Maybe it was the almost venomous earnestness with which Dorothy did things that first began to make them pall.

In some ways you might have thought them an ill-assorted couple. He was short and sturdy, with quiet brown eyes, and a kind of intellectual shyness. She was tall for a woman, handsome in a glittering way and with qualities that would have made for attractiveness only to a man quite different from Prentisse—knowledge of the jargons and sporting chatter, and with it that shrewd judgment that knows when to be only a highly ornamental background.

At Cambridge Lutley had read history and, until his marriage, had contributed occasionally to various reviews. That particular writing had been a part of his leisure, but later, when the hectic life of his first married years had began to seem aimless and even boring, he had thought with regret of the pleasure his earlier labors had given him. Out of it had come his attempt at a first novel, and its publication.

All this was just before the last war when money was money and life less demanding. As for his marriage, he had met Dorothy at the house of George Foster, an old Cambridge friend, and it so happened that she had been at school with George's wife, Miriam. Dorothy's father had just died—he had been vicar of Purfield Warren—and she had come into a reasonable sum of money.

Six months after that first meeting they were married. He was then thirty-one and she twenty-eight, though she claimed to be younger. It was a love match on his side if not on hers. Her friends agreed that he had married a most attractive woman, her enemies that she had done

exceptionally well for herself. But it would have been hard to judge objectively the success or otherwise of that marriage. Lutley, one could see through: the woman he had wed was far more inscrutable. In public a softly-murmured "Darling!" and a playful tap are no particular signs, especially when the other hand holds a liquor glass drained for the eighth time.

When Prentisse at first, and almost surreptitiously, returned to his writing, his wife seemed neither to mind nor to be interested. After all, she had plenty of outside interests. On her first discovery of his new activities it had been: "Darling, how frightfully clever of you!" and then, at intervals, "Oh, you poor dear, I hate to see you working so hard! Why don't you stop now and rest?" Then, on the publication of his first novel, "Darling, it's too frightfully thrilling for anything!"

Thereafter it might have been said by the unkind that her tolerance or possible encouragement of his efforts was not unconnected with material considerations. But Prentisse apparently doted on her and generously provided that his earnings should be hers in the form of special presents.

But the Spring of 1947 had seen a slight deterioration in the warmth and closeness of their relationship. He was engaged on a new book which he definitely knew was good, and he refused to take his work to the Riviera. Dorothy had however kept to the routine and had gone to Mentone with a small circle of friends that included Peter Claire and Miriam Foster.

Claire, a handsome, country club type man of about thirty-five, was a very old friend. Prentisse, in his own undemonstrative way, was very fond of him. The Prentisses saw a lot of him when he was in town and he often dined at the Hampstead house.

It was because he did not want to keep that house open during his wife's absence that Prentisse had taken that Porter Street flat. Dorothy was away till the very end of May and then something happened. Her only sister had been taken seriously ill and she had gone down to Carnford to be with her.

That was not so unsettling for Prentisse as it might have been, for the book was not quite finished. A few days would see it with the publisher and he stayed on at the flat. In the morning he usually put in his best work, but that particular morning he was not actually working. He was annoyed, and worried, over what seemed a very trivial thing.

Before him was the morning's edition of *The Times* and it was at a certain letter that he was scowling. A policeman had written rather indignantly on the

treatment of his profession by writers of detective novels. The police, he affirmed, were treated like buffoons and authors rarely troubled to make themselves familiar with the real workings of either Scotland Yard or the C.I.D. departments of provincial forces.

But it was not the police and their methods that were worrying Lutley Prentisse but the whole principle which the letter called in question. He himself had always been careful to use in his books such local color as had been familiar and things with which he had had at least a working acquaintance, but in that novel, now almost finished, he had brought in something with which he was not familiar at all—a private detective agency.

The chapter which dealt with it had been written and he had taken a great deal for granted, not caring much whether or not an absolute verisimilitude had been achieved. A detective agency, for instance, would have an office. Well, such offices were surely pretty much alike, and in his novel its appearance had been guessed at. And so with the head of the firm, and the conversation, and all the things that go to make what one calls local color.

Some people would have regarded the whole thing as utterly unimportant. There could be little connection between that letter and the chapter in question. They would have argued that a private detective was most unlikely to read that particular chapter and that the man in the street, provided the book as a whole kept him reading into the small hours, would not care the proverbial tuppence about the niceties of local color.

But such a view was contrary to Prentisse's meticulous mind. He was also a man of impulses and curious obstinacies. That was why he suddenly made up his mind that the right thing to do would be to visit a detective agency and check up that chapter in the light of such new impressions as he might form. But the resolve brought also an annoyance.

There was the chance that his guesses in that chapter had been reasonably correct and that the chapter would not have to be rewritten. But whether that were so or not, time would be wasted and just when he was fired with the urge to finish the book. To ignore the letter seemed sheer carelessness. That letter from the policeman might start a spate of inquiries into local color. Heaven knew what people and professions would be writing to the Press about the gross errors they had unearthed. He could almost see one such letter—

Dear Sir,
Referring to the matter of lo-

cal color, I was very amused to find in a novel by Lutley Prentisse entitled "Tingling Symbols" a statement that . . .

In any case that morning he was unable to settle down to work and just before noon he went along to his club. He ran into George Foster and they lunched together.

"Was that Peter Claire I saw getting into a taxi just as I came in?" Prentisse happened to ask.

"That's right," George said. "I was talking to him just before. He's going down to Cambridge tomorrow to play for the Pilgrims against the Wanderers. A two-day match. Did you want to see him?"

"Well, in a way—yes. I wanted him to give me an introduction to his brother. He's a Chief Constable, as you probably know, and I hoped he might give me some local color and save some rather tiresome inquiries."

George Foster was probably the only man to whom he would have told that morning's worries. George didn't seem at all unhappy about it.

"I don't think a Chief Constable would help very much," he said. "Why not go to the fountain head? I know a really good firm of private detectives who did an excellent job for a friend of mine. You go along and see them. Just make up some yarn or other. Just a simple job that won't cost very much. That ought to give you the whole bag of tricks."

Foster happened to remember the name of the firm and the approximate address, and that Friday afternoon Prentisse made a bold decision and went to Took Street. The taxi driver happened to know the number and on a door on the first floor Prentisse found what he wanted.

PERRING AND HOLT
PRIVATE INQUIRY AGENTS

He knocked, and the door was opened with instant and agreeable promptitude by a receptionist.

"Can I see one of the principals, please?" he asked.

"Take a seat, sir, please," the young lady replied. "I think Mr. Holt is free. Have you a card?"

A couple of minutes and he was in Holt's room. It was a smallish office crammed with filing cabinets and reference books. There was the usual flat-topped desk and swivel chair. Holt, a dapper-looking youngish man, rose and held out a hand.

"How d'you do, Mr. Prentisse. Take a seat, will you? Cigarette? . . . And what precisely may we do for you?"

"Well, er—"

Holt smiled reassuringly. "Secrets are safe with us, sir. We're used to handling affairs of the utmost delicacy, and in the strict-

est of confidence. You can rely on us implicitly."

Prentisse had to think quickly. The thoughts he had had were now in thin air. It would be crude to admit that he was in that room solely for the purpose of picking brains. When he did speak it was only to make time.

"It's a fairly trivial matter," he said.

"It doesn't matter to us, sir," Holt assured him. "Whatever the work, we can undertake it. And in strict confidence."

His manner was suave and impressive. Prentisse thought of the use he had made in his novel of an imaginary detective agency and decided on something along the same lines.

"Well"—there was still a certain diffidence in his manner—"I take it you're prepared to keep people under observation? Not necessarily to do with divorce, of course."

"Most certainly." He drew a pad towards him, and the pen was poised. "Name, sir?" he inquired.

"Lutley Prentisse."

Holt smiled. "Not your name, sir," he said. "The name of the person it will be our task to watch."

Prentisse smiled too, but not at that mistake he had made. An idea had come to him, and wrapped up in it were all the elements of the ludicrous.

"Ah, yes, of course. The name is Peter Claire."

"Address?"

"Address?"

"Three, Oudenarde Mansions, Kensington."

"And what exactly do you want, sir—and when?"

"Just a report in confidence, by Monday, of what he does from now until then. You can manage that?"

"Most decidedly. Where do you wish the report delivered?"

"Five B, Porter Street, Mornington Crescent. About noon, if you can manage it."

That was virtually all. As he walked down the stairs Prentisse was both gratified and mildly amused. He had been in the office of a detective agency and what he had seen and heard would involve only minor alterations in the carefully written chapter.

As to the amusement, it would certainly be uproariously funny if Peter, during his stay in Cambridge, discovered that a private detective was on his heels. And then suddenly he halted, and frowned. Annoying, too. The least thing he could do was to get hold of Peter and warn him. A knowledge of what was going to happen would make the joke the property of Peter as well as of himself.

From his flat he rang Oudenarde Mansions. Claire's man, Daniels, answered the telephone. Mr. Prentisse was just a few min-

utes too late. Mr. Claire had just left by taxi. Yes, Daniels was certain he had gone to Cambridge. He'd definitely taken his golf bag and a week-end suitcase.

"You know the hotel he'll be staying at?" Prentisse asked.

"I don't, sir," Daniels said. "All I know is that he'll be back early on Monday."

So that was that—though Prentisse was still glad he'd hit on Claire as a stalking-horse for Holt's detective. A less intimate friend of the family would be highly indignant when he learned what had been going on. And Claire *would* learn, though now he must wait until Monday. So Prentisse sat down at the typewriter and wrote for Claire's exclusive enlightenment an account of the whole thing.

. . . And that's how it happened. It will be extremely amusing if you chance to spot the sleuth. In any case I'll send you the report, innocuous though it will be. Until Monday then.

Yours as ever,
Lutley.

P.S. Why not have dinner with us on Monday? I'm expecting Dorothy back from Carnford. Her sister's much better.

He went out at once and mailed the letter and as he walked back to the apartment he wondered if Peter's reactions would be altogether what he himself had expected. Not that Peter hadn't a sense of humor in a rather hearty way.

That evening he worked hard at the detective agency chapter and rewrote where the afternoon's call on Holt seemed to require it. By Saturday he had the chapter well in hand and that afternoon he treated himself to a matinee.

In the evening he dined at his club and then went back to his apartment and outlined the final chapter of his novel. On the Sunday morning he went to the Hampstead house. Dorothy had everything arranged. Lunt, butler and general man, was there, as were the cook and the maid. It was from the house that he rang Carnford Hall.

Phipps, the butler, answered. "I'm sorry, sir, but Mrs. Prentisse isn't back yet from church. She should be in at any moment. Yes, sir, the mistress is practically herself again. The doctor's very pleased. Just a moment, sir. I think I hear Mrs. Prentisse now."

A minute later Dorothy Prentisse was on the line.

"That you, darling? How sweet of you to ring! Yes, I'll be back early in the morning. I'm glad you found everything as it should be. But you shouldn't have asked Peter to dinner. Well, I'd been looking forward to us having our evening together

alone . . . A special reason? Well, we might find some special excuse and put him off. He won't mind . . . Till tomorrow then, darling. 'Bye."

Bright and early on Monday Holt himself arrived at the Porter Street apartment. He was like a man who had been given a job to do, and knew that he had done it well. From an unsealed envelope he produced several closely typed sheets.

Prentisse gave them a glance, tried to look impressed, and asked how much. Holt's account was for just over eighteen pounds and Prentisse wrote him a check.

"It looks a lot of money, sir, but I think you'll find the job was done really well. If you're satisfied I hope you'll recommend us to any of your friends, should an occasion arise."

It *was* a lot of money, Prentisse thought ruefully, for the view of an office and a few minutes with Holt. It rather looked, in fact, as if Peter would have the laugh. Which reminded him. Peter would be at Oudenarde Mansions and he'd better be rung up at once. And then Prentisse couldn't help wondering just how that sleuth of Holt's had got to work and he took the typed sheets from the envelope and began casually to read.

The party was picked up almost on arrival and followed to Liverpool Street Station where he took the train for Wenton Junction. He was met by a small black sedan driven by a lady and the car was followed to Justin Friars, six miles away, where it entered the grounds of a smallish country house known as Friars House. Phillipson followed me and he and I shared the supervision from then on.

Prentisse stopped reading. He had wondered why Peter had not gone to Cambridge and he smiled to himself as he knew why. After all, Friars House was Peter's, and Justin Friars was only some twenty miles from Cambridge. He knew it well enough. He had been there once or twice when he and Dorothy had been staying at Carnford Hall. It wasn't more than a ten-minute run in a car. As for the woman, she was probably Peter's married sister. Or wasn't she still in India? Maybe she and her husband were home on leave. Curiosity made him read on.

There seemed to be no servants whatever in the house but observation was difficult. The couple did not appear until about eight-thirty that evening when they walked round the lawns and the borders and back through the long walk to the house. The woman was tallish, fair and about thirty by all appearances. Once or twice the couple were seen to embrace during their tour of the garden.

Prentisse was horrified. The woman was definitely not Peter's

sister and who she might be he had no idea. What he did know was that in beginning a joke he had committed an enormity. He had intruded unwarrantably into another man's private life and the fact that it had been done under a lamentable misapprehension would not make it appear the less reprehensible. His face was flushed as he realized what he must at once do.

He rang Oudenarde Mansions and it was Daniels who answered.

"Sorry, sir, but the master's just gone away."

"Away? What do you mean?"

"What I said, sir. He got back at about eleven o'clock and almost at once he ordered me to pack his bags for the South of France. He didn't know how long he'd be away."

"Good God! Any idea why he went off like that?"

"No idea at all, sir," Daniels replied.

"Very extraordinary!" Prentisse said. "There should have been a letter for him from me asking him to dinner tonight. Did he read it? It was on pale blue paper."

"Yes, sir, I remember it. He read it as soon as he came in."

"Very extraordinary!" Prentisse said again. Let me know as soon as you hear anything from him."

"I will, sir," Daniels promised.

Prentisse hung up. He was angry and he was worried. What on earth could have possessed Claire to have made him go off like that? If it was that letter, then he surely should have had sense enough to know that his secrets were implicitly safe. And the trouble was that nothing could be done about it until Daniels or someone had news of Peter's whereabouts in the South of France. Or might that damnable report have in it some clue as to his whereabouts?

He picked it up and once more began reading.

A light went on in a bedroom at about ten o'clock and we brought a ladder from the garden and placed it near the open window when the lights went out. We had to act with enormous care but hearing was perfect. There were the following scraps of conversation.

(1.) "Are you sure Phipps can be trusted?"

"Yes," the woman said. "I'll square it with him on Sunday morning again. I'll have to be there in any case when he"— name not identified — "rings. He'll be sure to ring about noon."

(2.) "Darling, we'll have to be most careful from now on.

"You really mustn't go making faces at me behind his back." He *is apparently the unidentified name of 1.*

"It's all rather funny in a way," Claire said. "He's not a

bad old stick, really. I don't think we'll be running any risk."

Something had already stood still with Lutley Prentisse. He read the rest of those sheets and as if his eyes no longer saw any words. When he laid the last sheet down he stood for a moment, hand gripping the table and his face a queer gray.

A few minutes later he left the flat. The commissionaire whom he passed said afterwards that he looked straight through him and that ever since he had not been able to force from his mind the look that had been on Prentisse's face.

Whether he was mad at that moment is a debatable point. How different men should react to the stress of emotions is equally debatable. But that a man of his fine fibre, sensitive and artistic, should otherwise have done what he did is incomprehensible.

At first his movements seemed rational. He took the tube to Hampstead and made his way to his house and spoke rationally enough to the staff. Mrs. Prentisse had gone out for a moment, he was told, but should be back practically at once. He went out himself and at a music shop bought a gut 'cello string. When he came back, Mrs. Prentisse was there.

Five minutes later Lunt brought in tea. He found Mrs. Prentisse lying dead on the carpet and Prentisse sitting writing at that Queen Anne bureau. Lunt, white-faced and aghast, could get no answer from him. So he ran out to the road and got a message to the police.

When they came it was still as if Prentisse did not hear. He let them take him by the arm and lead him away. The sergeant had a look at that paper on which he had been writing.

"Heavenly days, have a look at this, Inspector. What do you suppose it means?"

The inspector had a look. It didn't mean anything to him either. It was just a phrase, written over and over again.

"To the Editor of *The Times.*
Dear Sir.

"To the Editor of *The Times.*
Dear Sir.

"To the Editor . . .
Dear Sir."

the sacrificial lamb

by . . . William Campbell Gault

"Go back to where the grass is green!" they said. So Johnny went —but not before he split apart a three-cornered murder frame.

IT WAS a few minutes past four o'clock, and the day shift—among them Johnny Ellis—was pouring out of all the huge entrances of the Donald Aircraft Company on Canon Park Drive. It was a two-story stucco building, running for eight or nine blocks along the Drive. There was an air field at the eastern end of the building, and it had in general the aspect of a carefully guarded military establishment.

Johnny opened his lunch bucket so that it could be inspected by the guards, and once outside, stood at the bicycle racks near the entrance turnstile, waiting for Shorty. Ellis was a slim young man, fairly tall, with a thin, intelligent face, and eyes of a peculiar light blue color. He was wearing Levis, a faded army shirt, and crepe-sole shoes.

Shorty Carter came out presently, walking with one of the girls from the tool room. He was a French-Canadian, about five feet, four inches tall, and he seemed almost that broad.

He winked at Johnny. "I'll

William Campbell Gault's characters have a robust kind of self-reliance which enables them to navigate crime's shark-infested waters with a sure instinct for survival. At times they may become genuinely frightened, but in the end they straighten themselves out with a good five cubits added to their stature. The novel which won Mr. Gault a Mystery Writers of America "Edgar" was called: DON'T CRY FOR ME. *You won't cry for Johnny either, in this brand new, tension-fraught crime saga with a wholly unexpected climax.*

---

meet you tonight, boy. I'm busy, now, see?"

"I see," Johnny said, and grinned at him. With an admonitory "Take it easy," he turned, and went over to wait with the knot of workers at the pedestrian crossing.

It was a little hard to imagine how Shorty could fancy himself as a Lothario. He had a face vaguely resembling a bucket of mud and—undying hope.

The pedestrian signal changed, and Johnny moved quickly across the street, slightly detached from the rest of the group, his eyes on the asphalt of the road. His hands were wet, and they trembled a little. He walked with an almost imperceptible limp.

Shorty was getting to be a hard man to know, and Johnny wondered if the stocky youth was playing it cagey for a reason, or if he just didn't have time for new friends.

From the parking lots lining the north side of the street cars were pouring, and he wanted no part of that boisterous, almost rowdyish confusion. He turned in at the company cafeteria. He sat there, nursing a cup of coffee, frustration strong in him.

Kid stuff, he told himself. *Comic book stuff. Who the hell do I think I am?*

The door opened, and a blonde girl, dressed in Levis and tee shirt stood there, glancing around the huge room. She carried a vacuum bottle in a knitted cover.

She saw Johnny, smiled, and came his way. She set the bottle on the table, and said, "Trying to avoid me, are you? Wait'll I get a cup of coffee."

Johnny smiled at her. She had a sort of scrubbed look and her hair was a natural wheat color. She was an easy girl to smile at.

When she came back with her coffee, she said, "Today's the first day in three weeks you didn't wait for me. Are we no longer making beautiful music?" She sat down and pulled out a package of cigarettes.

"I—forgot," Johnny said.

"You don't have to tell me. I guessed. My lead man's carrying an acetylene torch for me too. I can do better than you, Fickle."

"Beware of lead men," Johnny said. "And assistant foremen. Above that level you run into men of character." He reached over to hold a match to her cigarette.

She was looking at the flame when she said, "What were you, Johnny, before you became an aircraft assembler?"

He was silent, waiting for her eyes to come up and meet his. A tension grew in him, and his fingers trembled. He shook out the match. His smile was stiff.

"What is this, a credit report? If you must know—I was a bum."

"For long?" she asked.

"All my life. I was born in a boxcar. Your coffee's getting cold."

"Oh," she said. "A joke. I was prying, huh?"

"I don't know. *Were you?*"

"No."

He studied the young candor of her clean-lined face. "I should know you wouldn't be. I'm sorry I was rude. I wasn't much of anything before this. And little enough, now. And what were you, June Belfast, before you became an aircraft assembler?"

"A student."

"High school?" he asked.

"U.C.L.A.," June said. "It's not the worst kind of basic training."

He smiled. "All that to prepare yourself for a dollar-forty an hour job?"

She sipped her coffee, saying nothing.

"Or — patriotism?" Johnny asked.

"My brother was in Korea."

Silence—despite the clatter from the service counter, the whirr of the huge fans overhead, and conversation from the next table. At their table, complete silence.

After a while, Johnny said quietly, "Well, it looks as if that one is wrapped up in cellophane for the moment."

"That one is," she said. "How about the next one?"

"Nobody knows about the next one," Johnny said. He stirred uncomfortably. He wanted to be insulated from all that. There were some things to do before he could afford to let the uncertainties of the future weigh too heavily upon him.

She finished her coffee, and stood up. "See you around," June said evenly, and walked off toward the door.

Johnny turned in his chair and started to say something, then thought better of it. He watched her through the huge front windows, walking toward the parking lot.

Traffic on the street was thinner now, but he finished his cigarette before going out. The parking lot was almost deserted on the half devoted to the day shift. His old coupe was right in the middle of the deserted half.

And Shorty Carter stood next to it.

The tension in Johnny mounted again, but he forced himself to ignore it. "She give you the brush-off, Romeo?" he asked, grinning.

"She's married," Shorty said. "They're all married." He took a deep breath. "What did you have in mind for tonight?"

"Poker," Johnny said. "Know anybody who wants to play?"

Shorty shook his head. "Why don't we go to Danceland? I do better there when you're along."

For an instant Johnny hesitated. Then he smiled, and tapped

Shorty on the shoulder. "Okay," he said. "You'd better pick me up in your car. I got a very fine bottle, unopened. A pinch bottle."

"Hey," Shorty said. "Hey—Scotch?"

"Hey—Scotch," Johnny said. "I'll be seeing you."

"You sure as hell will," Shorty said. He waved, and walked over to a huge green and tan convertible, parked near the gate. About thirty-five hundred dollars worth of car—and Carter was only an assembler.

The convertible came to life and went growling across the asphalt toward the gate. Johnny stood there, watching it move off. And thinking about a dusty road—and his brother, Pete.

At the liquor store near the Ocean Arena, he bought a quart bottle of Scotch, pinch bottle.

He had a bed-in-the-closet apartment near the beach, in Venice, and after his shower he pulled down the bed and flopped.

He lay there in the velvety darkness, thinking of June. He'd met her in the employment office. They had both filled out their applications together, and been interviewed at the same time. They had even left the medical exam room together. And Johnny, who wasn't usually quite so bold, had suggested a cup of coffee in the cafeteria across the street.

She'd looked at him, curiously, and then over at the cafeteria, thoughtfully. He could remember the sudden warmth of her smile. "I guess I'll be safe, there," she'd said. "I don't usually get picked up on Mondays."

"There's a first time for everything," Johnny had replied. "And anyway, we're practically related. We're both children of the great Donald Aircraft Corporation."

They had taken in several movies, since then, and spent a day together at Santa Anita. There'd been one kiss, casually started and feverishly finished. And on Johnny's side, a dream or two. On hers—?

It was hard to tell about June Belfast.

The breeze from the ocean whipped the faded curtains at the window, and turned over a page of the magazine lying on the scratched end-table. A four-by-eight apartment *would* be something to bring June to after her home in Westwood, he told himself despondently. Up until today, they'd never talked about the past. They'd talked about drills and rivet guns, routers and tin snips, center wing and trailing edge. It seemed, now, as though they'd been very careful to avoid talking about themselves.

Why?

On his side it was understandable. But why on hers? There was nothing in her past to be

ashamed of, certainly—unless she realized just how wide was the gulf between his one-room apartment in Venice and the two thousand square feet of California Modern Ranch in Westwood, buried in flowers. There'd be no reason to share a past with anyone you didn't intend to share a future with.

The pinch bottle winked at him in the dim room. From the apartment above, a baby wailed, and there were footsteps hurrying across a bare floor. He roused himself, and went over to the refrigerator, which stood in an alcove next to the small kitchenette.

He prepared a hasty but satisfying meal of scrambled eggs and salami, toast and coffee. His four-tube radio gave forth the chatter of a hit parade platter program, while his thoughts went back to Pete and then forward to tonight.

He washed the dishes and dressed, and sat near the window, reading the magazine. He was sitting there when the door opened.

Shorty Carter was wearing a new slate gabardine suit, with matching socks and tie and an oxford shirt. There wasn't a cheap shred of clothing on him—and he made a dollar-seventy an hour. He greeted Johnny with a grin.

"Let's get to that Scotch," he said.

While Shorty busied himself with stripping the tinfoil from the pinch bottle Johnny went into the kitchenette and returned with two small tumblers. He poured about an inch of liquor in the bottom of each.

"Water?" he asked.

"With this kind of whiskey?" Shorty grimaced, lifted his glass and downed the liquor in one swift gulp.

Shorty was reaching for a refill before Johnny could raise his glass to his lips. The stocky man's hand trembled as he poured the liquor, tilting the bottle till the glass almost overflowed. Then he looked at Johnny, the tumbler in his hand.

"Doesn't that Donald place drive you nuts?" he asked. "The racket, and all?"

Johnny shrugged. "It's a living."

"Living?" Shorty's laugh was raw. "You'd never catch me calling it that."

Johnny sipped his drink. "Why don't you save your dough and get out of it, then."

"I got dough," Shorty said crisply. "I got enough."

"Oh," Johnny said. "Patriotism, huh?"

Shorty made a contemptuous sound in his throat. "Hell, I lost that at Okinawa. Naw, it's—" He blew out his breath.

Johnny said, "You're just restless, Shorty. Everybody is. I had a—a friend at Okinawa. Okin-

awa was a rough deal, the way he told it."

Shorty was pouring another drink. He turned, the tumbler half full, his gaze challenging and direct. "Friend? You had a brother, Pete Ellis. *My* friend, but *your* brother. He carried a picture of you. Johnny, go back to Jefferson, and don't mess around out here. If Pete wasn't the best friend I ever had, I'd keep my mouth shut. But—"

Shorty paused, staring past Johnny. Shorty's mouth was open, and his body was perfectly rigid as he stared at the window behind Johnny.

The sound of the shot was like an artillery barrage in the small, cramped apartment.

Shorty's drink went untasted.

II

The room was small and held two desks and five straight chairs. The two windows were in the same wall, facing on the parking area, and the headlights of the prowl cars glinted across them with the constant traffic outside.

There were two men in the room, and one of them was Johnny Ellis. The smell of cordite seemed to linger in his nostrils.

The man behind the desk was thin, his skin burned to a dry deep brown. He wore a Palm Beach suit and a narrow black knit tie. He said, "You don't know anything about his background, then?"

"I—I guess he was in the service. Sergeant, is he—going to be okay?"

"He's dead," Sergeant Kransky said. "A forty-five slug right smack in the middle of his chest. It took pieces of his spine along, coming out. He was dead before he hit the floor."

Pete and now Shorty . . . *Pete and now Shorty* . . . Pete and now . . . The room moved and rocked. The lights on the window blurred.

Kransky said, "You sick? Want a glass of water?"

Johnny squeezed the knuckles of one hand, his forearms resting in his lap, his eyes on the floor. He shook his head slowly.

When he lifted his eyes, he saw that Kransky was standing. He took a deep breath, and told the sergeant, "I had a couple drinks, and when you told me he was dead—" A muscle at the angle of Johnny's jaw twitched. "I'll be all right."

"Sure." The sergeant sat down again. From a pack of cigarettes on the desk, he removed one and put it carefully between his lips. He performed the act almost like a robot, his gaze directed toward the center of the room. After a moment, he frowned, and said, "What a lulu. A shot out of nowhere, for no reason, killing a man with no record." He laid the cigarette on the desk. "What

were you two talking about when it happened?"

"Women — and liquor," Johnny told him. "And working at the plant. Shorty said he was getting sick of it."

"So. Any *particular* woman you talked about?"

Johnny Ellis shook his head.

"Who knew he was coming to your apartment?"

"I don't know. Shorty lived alone. We made the date on the parking lot, after work."

Sergeant Kransky picked up the cigarette, without ritual this time, and shoved it into his mouth. He lighted it, and inhaled deeply. "A pretty swanky car he had. And his clothes fitted in with it. What kind of a car do you drive?"

"A five-year-old Chev. I haven't been working at the plant very long."

"I see. Have you got any relatives out here?"

Johnny shook his head. "I haven't any close relatives, anywhere."

"Where'd you come from? What's your home town?"

"Jefferson, Wisconsin. We— I had a small farm near there, but it was too much work, and I got sick of the winters."

Kransky raised a hand. "Who's *we?* You started to say 'we.' "

"My brother and I had a small farm there, and—"

"Where's your brother, now?"

"He died." Johnny could feel the perspiration running down his sides. "He died last fall."

"How?"

The single word went around the room, getting bigger and bigger. There was no way to evade it. The record was too easy to check.

Johnny said quietly, "He was —murdered. He was shot."

Kransky leaned back in his chair, and something like relief came to the thin, weathered face. "Now we're getting somewhere." His voice turned flat. "So you came out here, looking for the French-Canadian. You fingered him, set him up and—*who handled the gun?*"

He leaned forward, his dark blue eyes burning into Johnny's. "Not that I blame you, understand. I'm just asking you who handled the gun."

"I don't know," Johnny said quietly. "I haven't the faintest idea."

"But you set him up? You came out here and looked him up."

Johnny lied with a shake of the head. "That's not true. He was just somebody I met out here."

"You worked in the same department, didn't you?"

Johnny shook his head. "We met in the company cafeteria. There's no connection, Sergeant. It's just—a crazy, damned coincidence."

"No," the sergeant said, "it's

not a coincidence. Come clean, boy." He leaned forward, again. "Be smart now—before it's too late. Be smart."

"There's nothing to say," Johnny protested. "There's nothing I can tell you."

Kransky stared at him for seconds, and then said softly, "Sure there is. You think about it a little, and you'll realize there's lots you can tell me. Stay here, tonight, and think it over. We'll need a charge to hold you, and we'll just call it 'suspicion of murder' until you think it over." His smile was purely muscular.

It was a bewildered Johnny Ellis—not many minutes later—who found himself alone in a cell. In the next cell, a man snored. Across the way, he could hear a low murmur of conversation. All around him, men slept or lay awake quietly, or talked in low voices. The place was full of humanity, but he'd never been lonelier in his life.

Somewhere, he'd read that a man could be held on suspicion for no more than seventy-two hours, and he guessed that Kransky had pulled this trick in an attempt to get him to open up. But these were just things he'd read and guessed. Both could be wrong. He had no friends, and men without friends, Pete had once told him, get railroaded every day. It could have been Pete's war-born cynicism.

"We ran a farm" he'd told Kransky. But Pete had been back to the farm only once since the war. For just a few hours on a rainy afternoon and he'd been killed that same evening. He'd been found by Johnny out on the road, near the mailbox.

Pete dead, Shorty dead . . . Shorty Carter had tried to warn him. Shorty was new to crime, new enough to still have some loyalties left. And one of those loyalties had been to Pete's brother.

Twenty-three, Johnny was, and he'd started doing a man's work at thirteen. He'd run a farm all alone since he was seventeen. He knew about girls and about whiskey and the odds against drawing to open-end straights.

Twenty-three years old and hard as nails, and it didn't seem at all logical that he would cry at a time like this. But cry he did. He sat on the edge of the cot, with the stink of antiseptic biting his nostrils, and the snores and night murmurs of the city's dregs all around him—sat there and sobbed quietly.

After a while, he lay on the cot, staring at the glow through the small window. The tears had given him some peace, and it was not long before he fell into a deep sleep of utter exhaustion.

Breakfast was oatmeal and thin milk in a tin dish, dry bread and bitter coffee. He ate it all, and went back to lie on the cot.

He wasn't going to tell Kran-

sky any more than he already had. Jefferson was a small town, but not too small to have a newspaper. And they all remembered Pete Ellis.

It was a little after nine when the turnkey came down with Sergeant Kransky.

The sergeant looked preoccupied, and not in the least sympathetic. As soon as the turnkey had opened the door, the police officer said, "You'll have to dictate a statement. Come along."

Johnny followed him along the concrete corridor between the cells where men sat and lay and stood looking out through the bars. Somewhere, a man whistled, and the sound followed them down the corridor.

In the same room they'd sat in the night before a uniformed man was waiting with a notebook and pencil. Kransky indicated a chair for Johnny to take, and sat down behind the desk.

He looked at his desk top, and then up at Johnny. His voice was flat, disinterested. "Just start, in your own words, from the parking lot, and carry through right up to the shooting. Everything he said to you and what you said in reply. Think hard, and stick to the facts. You'll have to swear to all of this."

It only took a few minutes, and all the time Johnny talked and the uniformed man wrote, Sergeant Kransky seemed to be in a world of his own, his fingers locked behind his head, his lean body tilted back in the chair.

Then the uniformed man asked, "That's it, Sergeant?" and Kransky nodded without looking at him.

The uniformed man left the room. Kransky picked up a newspaper that was folded on his desk, and unfolded it. He looked at it for an instant, and then handed it over to Johnny.

The headline read, UNIDENTIFIED MAN HELD IN VENICE SLAYING.

Johnny hadn't read beyond the headline when Kransky said, "You notice you're unidentified. I wasn't sure about you, see, and I didn't want to cause you any trouble, on the off chance you might be innocent. What have you got to say, this morning?"

Johnny thought of the night he'd spent, and the wretchedness of the men in the cells. His lips tightened and his eyes flashed angrily. "I've already said it—to the man with the notebook."

"Oh?" Kransky seemed as disinterested as ever. "I sent a wire to Jefferson last night. An hour ago I got an answer. Your brother and Shorty Carter served in the same outfit at Okinawa. And now they're both dead, both shot. And I suppose you're not interested in who shot them?"

Johnny's lips went white. *A wire . . . to Jefferson . . .*

"Well, speak up. Are you interested or not? If you are you

probably know a great deal more than you're telling."

Johnny shook his head. "That's not true."

"Maybe Carter shot your brother, and you shot Carter. That's why you looked him up, wasn't it?"

The color came back to Johnny's face. He said quietly, "I wanted to know about Pete. And I didn't want them to know, back home. But you had to wire them, didn't you? That's my town. My folks are buried there. But you had to stir up things, back there, didn't you?" He was trembling.

Kransky nodded. "Because you lied to me. I've covered for you so far, because your record's clean and the law in Jefferson seems to think you're a pretty fine lad. I'm becoming convinced now they're wrong about that."

Johnny said nothing. He laid the paper on the desk.

Kransky stood up and went to the door. He paused a moment, to look at Johnny and then said, "I'll be right back." He closed the door behind him.

From the desk top, the headline stared at Johnny. UNIDENTIFIED MAN . . . Pete too had been killed by an unidentified man, or woman.

The door opened and Sergeant Kransky came in with a typewritten sheaf of paper in his hand. It was Johnny's statement, which he signed.

Kransky blotted it carefully, and put it in a drawer. His voice was tired. "You're a damned fool, an awful damned fool, but that's what I'm up against every day. It wouldn't matter, except you're young, and I had the small hope you might develop a shred of sense. I suppose you'd like to think you've outsmarted me.

"I see defiant punks like you all the time, and I'm sick to death of them. I'm letting you go, not because you're in the clear, but because I can pick you up at any time. And maybe the guy with the gun will get to you soon, and save the taxpayers the expense of burying you. Don't move or change jobs. And now, *get out!*"

Johnny Ellis felt the pound of his heart, and his right fist clenched until it ached. He stood there, staring at Kransky, burning to swing on him, a pain throbbing behind his eyes.

Kransky's voice was a winter wind across snow. "Get out, I said." Kransky's eyes were like smoky blue marbles.

Johnny turned, and went out.

III

A hot sun in a clear sky, and the sidewalk shimmering under Johnny's gaze. The hum of traffic, the beep of a horn, and a crawling, crummy feeling of humiliation and slept-in clothes, of sticky skin and degradation.

Johnny had read a lot in the long nights on the farm, absorbing the traditions, the standards, and the background of a country he was proud to be a part of. He'd built up, in his young mind, a regard for American justice. Now it was shaken, and almost shattered—after his first experience with metropolitan law.

It was ten o'clock, a hot and glaring morning, and he'd been due at the plant two and a half hours ago. He didn't think he'd go back there to work. He had some money saved, and in Jefferson the farm waited. With Shorty Carter dead, he was nowhere. He had no knowledge of any of the others, no slightest clue as to their identity.

He didn't want to go home. The picture of Pete on the road was still too vivid in his memory. But nothing else made sense. Then he remembered Kransky's warning: *Don't move or change jobs.*

He went to work. It was nearly eleven when he got there, and he had to waste ten minutes waiting to have his identification checked at the guards' office, before he could get to the job. But he finished the working day in the heat and clatter of the center wing platform, trying to forget last night's nightmare in today's bedlam.

When he came out, June Belfast was waiting for him at the entrance. She said, "I didn't see you come in this morning. Were you late?"

He nodded wearily.

"I saw the morning paper," she said. "Your name wasn't mentioned. But that was *your* apartment where the man was killed, wasn't it?"

He nodded.

Her hand rested on his arm. "But your name wasn't mentioned. That means the police are trying to protect you. They must think you had nothing to do with it."

The touch of her hand was quieting, and he covered it gratefully with his own. "Let's get a cup of coffee," he said. He tightened his grip on her hand, and they moved out into the pedestrian stream. Her nearness was a comfort in itself.

June took a corner table in the cafeteria while Johnny went to the counter for their pie and coffee. Waiting to be served, he watched her at the table, intent on the paper. Young, vital, trim and pretty—what did she see in him? What could she possibly see? *Maybe it's my haircut,* Johnny thought.

When he came back to the table, June said, "I'll bet you think I'm just one of twenty girls you'd enjoy dating, but wouldn't dream of taking seriously."

"I've been thinking just the opposite," Johnny said. "I can't figure what *my* attraction is."

June looked at the pie.

"Apple," she said. "Is that what you've got, too?"

"Banana cream," he said. "I didn't think you'd like it."

"I love it," she told him, and switched plates. Then she looked up at him. "Haven't you ever met anybody who's—*just right* for you?"

"Never before you," he said. "And you don't know what you're saying."

"I know what I want," she said. "In just what way would I be making a mistake."

"In taking a serious interest in a farmer. That's what I am, you know. Or was—back in the Middle-West. You'd hate it."

"Would I? I was brought up in Chicago, and I loved it. Where was your farm, Johnny?"

"In Jefferson—Jefferson, Wisconsin. It's a very small town."

"That's beautiful country," she said. "Peaceful country."

He said nothing.

"And now tell me about last night," she asked quietly.

Johnny went further back than that. He went back to the night of Pete's death, and brought it forward to the present. He talked in a subdued, emotionless voice, as though he'd been a spectator. It was all behind him, now. He'd run into a dead end.

When he finished, she said, "You told the police all that?"

"No," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because back home, Pete's still a war hero," he said. "I was afraid of what they might learn about him."

June was silent for a moment, her eyes thoughtful. Then she said, "It must have been something big, don't you think? Something tremendous?"

He stared at her. "What makes you say that?"

"Why was Shorty working in the plant?" she said, quickly. "I mean, there must have been so much money involved that they planned to lie low for a while. There must have been somebody pretty smart in the driver's seat. Didn't your brother ever write you?"

"About three times a year. There's nothing in the letters that would help."

Again, she was silent. She took a deep breath, and pushed her half-finished piece of pie away from her. She sipped her coffee.

Johnny said, "Shorty was between two fires, probably. And there's another angle. They may not know how much he told me. He didn't tell me anything, really, but they may want to make sure. If they make just one reckless move—"

She stared at him. "You're not—hoping for something like that, are you?"

"What else is there to hope for?"

She shook her head. "Johnny,

no. You mustn't." She put her cup down, and it rattled on the Formica table top. "I should think, after last night, you'd have had your fill of trouble."

"Maybe I can hand out some trouble," Johnny said.

"What good would it do? Who'd gain?"

He didn't answer.

Her voice was low, strained. "That's for the police, Johnny. You've no legal grounds for any action of your own. You'd be fighting the killers *and* the police."

"If they look me up," Johnny said, "I'll get in touch with the police."

Her face became less tense. "Promise?"

"I promise."

"My boy," she said smilingly. "I'll snare you yet."

They parted at the parking lot. As he drove home through the dwindling traffic, the loneliness he'd felt so strongly the night before was mostly gone, along with his bitterness toward Kransky. He hadn't exactly cooperated with the sergeant, but there probably weren't many who did.

He parked in the alley behind his apartment and walked down it to the back entrance, where there was a small oblong of yard shielded from the alley by a block fence. A solitary tree grew in it, encircled by a double row of seashells.

IV

As Johnny came through the gate, he saw the woman sitting in the yard. She was a thin woman, on the sad side of thirty, dressed in a faded, blue cotton dress. Her hair was prematurely gray, her shoulders bony under the thin fabric.

She rose as Johnny came along the walk. She said, "Mr. Ellis—Johnny Ellis?"

"Yes?"

"I'm Mrs. Carter. I'm—Shorty's wife."

"Shorty's wife? I didn't know he had a wife."

"He didn't advertise me," she said. "I think he was trying to forget it, himself. What happened, Johnny?"

Her face was pleading.

"I don't know," Johnny said. "I wish I did."

"You're Pete's brother, aren't you? My husband knew you were. He was trying to figure your angle."

Johnny looked at her, and remembered the kind of clothes Shorty wore. He said, "Do you want to come in? I've got to sit down, somewhere. I'm out on my feet."

She came in and sat on the rattan davenport near the window. She said dully, "Shorty walked out on me, about a month ago, and got a room of his own, near the beach. I guess he didn't think I knew as much as I did.

Or maybe he knew I wouldn't go to the law, anyway."

Johnny said nothing. He was sitting in a straight chair near the kitchenette door, and fatigue was heavy in him.

"You *are* Pete's brother, aren't you?" she asked, after a moment.

Johnny nodded. "But I didn't know about—about whatever business he and Shorty were in. I came here to find out."

Her voice was bleak as a pauper's funeral. "You didn't know the business? Or about the big haul?"

Johnny straightened in his chair, his heart missing a beat. "What was it?"

"Narcotics was the business," she said quietly, "and the big haul was morphine. They hijacked a load going to a wholesale drug house—a heavily armed load. They killed one of the guards. It was the biggest narcotic knock-over of all time."

Johnny's voice was a whisper. "In New York—about three months ago?"

She nodded.

"I read about it," he said. He took a deep breath and looked down at his shaking hands. "I can't believe it about Pete. Pete wouldn't—I can't believe it."

"Pete," she said evenly, "was just a gun for hire. He didn't know how big the deal was. Shorty was just a gun, too, but he found out—and cut himself in."

"And Pete—?"

"I don't know. It wasn't Shorty who killed him. That I do know. Shorty was out here when Pete died."

Johnny said, "I figured he was. He wrote Pete a letter from out here that Pete never got. It came after he died, and I opened it. Your husband urged Pete to come out here—if he wanted to get into some real money."

"Real money?" She stirred restlessly on the rattan davenport. "Real money, all right—selling to juveniles, selling marijuana to the high school trade. And us with a kid fifteen, a daughter in Venice High. Sure, real money, real *blood* money."

Her voice broke suddenly and she lowered her head. Her thin body seemed to be possessed of an ague. Hoarsely, she said, "I won't break down, don't worry. I won't break down."

"Maybe you should," Johnny said gently. "Maybe you need to break down."

"No," she said. "What gets me, I still loved him even after I learned what he was doing. What does that make *me?*"

Johnny didn't answer. He closed his eyes, and saw Pete on the road. Her words echoed in his mind—*Pete was just a gun for hire.* He opened his eyes, and stared at her numbly.

Her voice was flat. "Your

brother probably died because of that big haul. Shorty got his cut, and orders to salt it, and secure a legitimate job until things quieted down. I've no idea where he put it, but he followed orders, all right. And picked up an extra hundred a week selling reefers to punks."

"And drove a big car and wore two-hundred-dollar suits," Johnny said. "They were leary of him, I'll bet. He probably told them about me."

"I don't think so. Or maybe I just want to believe he wasn't all rat." She took a deep breath.

Johnny said, "You're going to tell the police all you know, aren't you? Unless you already have."

She shook her head. "I've no love for the police."

"You owe it to Shorty," Johnny said.

Again, she shook her head. "He wouldn't want the law in it. I don't need them. I've still got one of his guns."

The lassitude left Johnny and he stared at her. "You mean—you know who killed him?"

"I'll find out. I know some of the people he worked with. They probably think I'm well fixed, now. I know one who will be around." She leaned forward. "That's why I came to you. You should feel the same way I do about them. You're not on their side of the fence either."

"Then I'd be on the *law's* side," Johnny told her. "And so should you."

"I had seven convictions before I was twenty," she said softly. "We won't go into that. But I'm not on the law's side—not ever." She looked down at the rug. "Before he went into the *army, Shorty was on the law's* side. And on *mine*. Now there's just me, and I thought—you." She rose. "I guess I thought wrong."

Johnny said nothing, thinking of the cell, of Kransky.

She said quietly, "Pete was your brother."

"Pete was a gun, you said—a gun for hire. And now you want me to be."

"Not for hire. There wouldn't be a nickel in it for you."

Johnny saw June's pleading young face, for some reason now touched with fear. And Kransky's taut face, and Pete's staring eyes. He said, "Don't count me out, yet. I want to think about it."

From her purse, she took out an envelope. She tore a piece off, and scribbled on the clean side. She handed it to him. "I'll be home every day, probably—and most nights. I'll be waiting." The hand holding the paper was perfectly steady again.

Johnny walked with her to the door. Then he came back to flop on the davenport. All of his animosity had left him. There was only a futile weariness in him, a

dismal feeling of spent and wasted emotion.

Pete had been one of his gods, and Pete had sold out to the quick buck, the power urge—to the gun law on the other side of the fence. The death of Pete had been only a physical death, if she was telling the truth. Pete had really died when he lost his human dignity, honor and self-respect.

If she was telling the truth. If, if, if—. Who the hell was she? A woman out of nowhere, the discarded wife of a gun and a dope peddler, with seven convictions before she was twenty. *What* was she? One of the people, one of the citizens, one of the millions born behind the eight ball and brought up in the shadow of the high stone walls. This much she was, a woman who had loved her man.

Johnny sat up and unlaced his shoes, peeled off his socks. What he needed now was a shower—and enough soap to make him feel like a human being again.

The shower helped very little. The contamination in his mind was still there, and it was almost physical. He knew that the town was full of people who lived in places as bad, and worse, and held jobs just as boring. But they hadn't come from clean little towns like Jefferson, or a tidy eighty acres of rolling farmland.

Why didn't he go home then? Because of June? Or was there only a blind, criminal recklessness and stubbornness behind his childish search for the killer of a man who'd died before there had been any need to avenge his death?

The woman could be lying. He'd never seen her before today. Why did he believe her? Why?

He dressed, and went out to eat, driving over to Wilshire in Santa Monica. It was a better place than he usually frequented, but he had a good meal coming, after this morning's slop.

From Santa Monica, he drove over to Westwood.

June and her father were on the front lawn, playing croquet. Her mother was on the porch, offering advice, a drink in one tanned, strong hand, her hair ruffled by the wind.

Mrs. Belfast saw Johnny first, and waved him up to the porch. "What are you doing to our girl, boy?"

Johnny looked over to where June was lining up a shot, oblivious of him. "Nothing," he said. "She's talking herself into a case."

Mrs. Belfast nodded. "That's what I thought. Obstinate girl. From her father's side of the family. It's all one way, Johnny?"

"No. No, but—what am I?"

"A hick. From Wisconsin. But we think you're all right, Johnny. What do you want to be?"

"A farmer."

"Good," she said. "Want a drink?"

"Not just now, thanks. Did June tell you what happened, last night?"

"Mmmm-hmmm. You should have told the police everything, I feel. But maybe I'm getting old. You can bet you're being watched, though."

Then June saw him, and stood there, not saying a word for a moment. Her mother went down the steps to the lawn, saying, "All right, I'll finish the game for you."

"Johnny," June said. "Hey, hello!"

Mr. Belfast waved, and winked.

"How about a movie?" Johnny said. "We'll just stay for one feature."

"I'd love it. What made you come over?"

He frowned at her. "Shouldn't I have?"

"Sure, but when I left you, why—I thought my cause was lost."

"I want to talk about that," Johnny said. "That's part of the reason I'm here."

On the way to the show, he told her about Shorty's wife, and he said, "I'll probably work with her. And after that, I think I'll go home."

"Alone?" she asked.

Johnny nodded, his eyes on a passing car. "Alone. I've made up my mind."

"Well, that's blunt enough. You're lucky I'm not sensitive." Her voice held a tremor.

"The way it looks, I'll be in the army before long. And before that, I'll be working the farm. You wouldn't like either one of those lives."

"It isn't something I could decide for myself, I suppose?"

"No. Because it isn't something you know anything about."

"Turn around," June said softly. "Take me home."

Johnny slowed, and turned to look at her. "You're being unreasonable. It's you I'm thinking of, all the way."

"Take me home. I've suddenly discovered I loathe you. Turn around, *now.*"

He turned around and headed back. There were no words for blocks. There were no words until he stopped in front of her house. Then she said, "Goodbye, Fearless Fosdick," and he was watching her going up the walk to her house.

He owed her an apology, but if he was going to leave her, this was as good a way as any. He sat there for only a few seconds before driving off.

V

Johnny Ellis drove back to Venice, but he didn't stop at his place. He went on and down to Linnie Canal, to a small frame house just on the other side of

the bridge. It was where Shorty Carter had lived, before he left his wife. She was living there alone now, and she smiled as she opened the door.

"Glad to see you," she said. "Welcome to the Carter mansion. Like a drink?"

"I could use one," he told her.

It was a small room he sat in, and poorly furnished. From the kitchen, just beyond, came the sound of a refrigerator door slamming and then the crackle of ice cubes leaving the tray.

A hundred a week plus what he made at Donald, plus a slice of the big melon. But this had been as good as he could do for his wife. No wonder Shorty had no luck with women.

She had only the one drink when she came through the doorway from the kitchen. She handed it to him, and went over to sit on a small wicker settee.

"I'm glad you came," she said. "I was getting scared. I talked so big, but it was just talk. They're—organized. They don't miss a trick."

Johnny hadn't touched the drink yet. He said, "How many of them do you know?"

"Two. One I don't really know, though he's been here pretty often. The other knew me back in the—before I met Shorty."

"That's the one who thinks you have money?"

She nodded. She looked at his drink, and asked, "Are you afraid there's something wrong with it?"

He looked at it for a few seconds, and lifted it to his lips. He swallowed about half of the contents. "This one who thinks you have money. Isn't he loyal to the organization?"

"So far. But he's got the customers, and if he had the money, he has a source. He'd like to go in for himself."

"Big man?" Johnny asked.

"I don't— What do you mean?"

"Too big for me to handle?"

She frowned. "That's not it. That's not what I had in mind. He's not the kind who'd scare. We'd play another angle. We'd let him think you had some money and tell him who you are. All you want from him, really, is the name of the man who killed your brother. And probably killed Shorty. That he'd give us, if he knew it, and if he thought he could go in for himself."

"And if he should get suspicious?"

She stood up, and went through the doorway to the kitchen again. When she came back, she had something wrapped in an oily flannelette cloth. She handed it to him.

"If he should get suspicious," she said, "you might find this kind of handy."

It was a service automatic, blue-steeled and bulky—a .45.

A strange thing happened as Johnny reached out to take it. He started to grasp, to close his fingers, inches before he had touched the gun.

Mrs. Carter said, "I think I'll call this man. He could be home now. Now's as good a time as any."

It was too pat. A flicker of suspicion stirred in Johnny's mind, and the incident of the gun prodded him. But he said, "Try him."

He stood up, then, and there was no wobble in his legs. But his mind was clear and active. Reassurance surged through him. He checked the clip in the automatic and slid it into the chair alongside him as he sat down again.

Mrs. Carter had a drink of her own half consumed when the man arrived. He was a stocky man, with light hair in a brush cut and a heavy, deeply-tanned face. He was introduced as Pertula, Joe Pertula.

Mrs. Carter said, "Joe and I have been friends for a long time, haven't we, baby?"

"We sure have." He winked at Johnny. "You're not making any mistake, Johnny, tying up with Gert, here."

Gert, here, tried to look impish, at that, but it was a grotesque gesture. She could have been thinking of Shorty, of course.

Pertula said, "I seem to be the only party without a glass in his hand. I'll remedy that, huh?"

"You know where it is," Gert said. And then, "Johnny is Pete Ellis' brother. You remember Pete, the man who was killed in Wisconsin?"

Pertula's tanned face went blank and he stared from Gert to Johnny and back. "Sure, I remember. What the hell goes on here, Gert?"

"A deal," Gert said. "Mix yourself a drink, Joe. Make it strong."

He shook his head. "First, what goes on? I don't need a drink that bad."

Mrs. Carter said, "Thirty-five thousand dollars goes on, Joe. Johnny and I can get that, between us. In cash. Go mix the drink."

Pertula continued to stand there, gazing at her thoughtfully. "I've known you a long time, Gert, and you've known me. You wouldn't try anything *silly,* with me, would you?"

She shook her head slowly.

He expelled his breath. "I'll mix a drink. Thirty-five grand would sure as hell do it."

There were some more drinks, and then they were sitting in the kitchen, around the kitchen table, eating potato chips.

And Gert Carter said, "Gallegher's the big boy in this business, Johnny." She looked at Pertula. "And Gallegher's the one I want, isn't he, Joe?"

Pertula was shaking a cigarette from a pack. He paused in the act, frowning at Gert. "Easy, now. All in good time."

He held the cigarettes out, and Gert took one. Johnny took one.

Johnny said thickly, "The one— You mean—" He stiffened.

"Easy," Pertula repeated. He held a match out, and lighted Johnny's cigarette. "We'll get to Gallegher. Or he'll get to us."

Johnny inhaled deeply. It didn't taste like a cigarette, but he'd been drinking fairly steadily.

Pertula's voice was hazy. "I know he got Pete Ellis. I'm not sure about Shorty, not yet. But I know he got Pete Ellis. He got Pete all right, Pete Ellis—got him from behind that bush, left him on the road. We'll get to Gallegher, all right, we'll get the—".

The road, and Pete . . . The road . . . Pete's staring eyes under the sheriff's flashlight . . . The stirring in Johnny was a deep poison, compounded of the year's headlines, the day's tragedy, the night's revelation. The cigarette had loosened these poisons, but the times had made them.

Pertula's voice went on, insistent but still hazy, oddly soft. "We'll get to him. Sitting there in that fancy bar of his, getting all the money trade, paying peanuts and killing off the competition—"

Johnny's voice seemed to come from the next room. "What bar?"

"Don't worry. The time will come."

Johnny's voice was louder, now. *"What bar?"*

"Take it easy, boy. It's not the right time."

The heft of the .45, the cool, smooth feel of it, the solid comfort of its power, so steady in Johnny's hand. And his voice was his now. "What bar? Take me there."

They were in the living room, though he didn't remember moving there. He stood near the kitchen entrance and they sat on the davenport. Both of them stared at him. Johnny had the gun in his hand.

Then Pertula said, "Well, I wouldn't want to argue with that. That's a big gun. And maybe it is the right time." He stood up. "But I haven't got a car."

"I have," Johnny said, and fumbled in a pocket for his keys. He tossed them to Pertula, but they fell far short.

Pertula reached over to pick them up. He said to Gert, "You'd better stay here. The less the better. That all right, Johnny?"

Johnny nodded, and smiled at Gert.

She nodded, and held one clenched fist for him to see.

Lights, which must have been passing cars and lights which could have been store windows.

Traffic lights and advertising lights and over them all the sheriff's flashlight . . .

"You want to go in alone, Johnny? I'll back you, if you want."

"I want to go in alone," he said.

"All right, then, listen to me. The word is 'frost.' You got that? Tell the bartender you want to see Gallegher about the frost. Keep that gun in your pocket, and play it smart, or you'll never get to where you can do any good. What's the word, now?"

"Frost," Johnny said. "I want to see Gallegher about the frost."

"Right. He's a short man, fat as a pig. He's got red hair, but his eyesbrows are almost white. Understand that?"

Johnny felt a sudden sharp pain under his ears. "Of course I understand." For a second his animosity wavered between the image of the man with red hair and Joe Pertula.

Joe said the right thing for the moment. He said, "He got Pete. Gallegher got Pete."

VI

And now Johnny Ellis stood alone on the sidewalk, and there was a huge neon sign blinking at him. *Gallegher's,* it read.

Joe was nowhere around. People went by, and he heard a girl laugh, and he turned to stare after her. Neither she nor her companion were looking his way, and his eyes went back to the sign.

Gallegher's . . . Gallegher the killer. Red hair and white eyebrows, fat as a pig, killer from ambush. *Gallegher's* . . .

The automatic was heavy in his pocket. It seemed to throw him off balance. He went through the solid glass door to a room of ebony and cardinal, cove-lighted, carpeted.

It was a fairly narrow room, but long, with a high mirrored ceiling. The bar ran the length of the room.

The bartender nearest the door had a long thin face and friendly brown eyes. "What will it be, sir?" he asked.

Johnny stared at him for some seconds, while he tried to get the words straight in his mind. The bartender started to frown.

Then Johnny said, "I want to see Gallegher. He's in, isn't he? He's here?"

The bartender's face was bland. "He could be, sir. He's here quite a lot. Could I have your name, please?"

"He can," Johnny said, "but you can't." A wave of fuzziness passed over him, and he put a hand on the bar. He forced himself to speak very clearly. "Just tell Gallegher I want to see him about the frost."

"Oh, yes." There was interest now in the friendly eyes. "You

were recommended to Mr. Gallegher by—someone, were you?"

Johnny nodded. "Do I see him, or don't I? Is he that hard to see? I can take my business somewhere else, you know."

The bartender frowned, and then his eyes went past Johnny, and he smiled. He said, "Customer, I guess, Al."

A big man, this Al. Big and broad, wearing a blue flannel suit over a lighter blue sport shirt, the collar of the shirt buttoned. A faintly flattened nose and a heavily featured, stupid face.

Al's grin showed a prominent gold tooth. "This man's high," he said. "You a friend of Gallegher's, young fellow?"

"Take me in to him and find out," Johnny said.

The big man looked at the bartender, and grinned again. "Sure, why not? Come along, feller."

Johnny followed him the length of the long barroom to a door at the far end. He walked carefully, keeping his weight to the left side, balancing the pull of the heavy gun.

Stepping into the quietness of the hall beyond the door rattled him, momentarily. It was as though he'd built up a wall against the pressure of the street noises, the conversation of the bar, and this sudden deathly quiet pulled away the wall's support.

He paused, a moment, heard the reassuring hum of the talk from the bar, and followed the big man again, down the hall to a door on the left side.

The big man knocked and someone said, "Yes?"

"Al, Boss. A visitor—maybe a customer, hunting the shrine."

"Come in."

Al opened the door, and stepped aside, and nodded for Johnny to enter.

It was a plain room, with six or eight straight-backed chairs and an immense octagonal poker table. Three filing cabinets were set against the far wall, and at Johnny's left as he entered there stood a massive desk.

Behind this desk, a man sat, and he had red hair. He had a bulky, short body and a porcine face and white eyebrows. But it was the hair that attracted Johnny's gaze.

"Gallegher?" Johnny asked, and his voice was hoarse.

The man started to nod, and then his face went slack and he said, "Al, the guy's got a rod! For God's sake, Al—" He threw both hands in front of his face, and twisted toward the wall.

The gun was in Johnny's hand and the red of Gallegher's hair was in Johnny's mind, and the sound of the .45 seemed to shake the building.

Once, twice, three times and then the red changed to black in Johnny's mind. He saw a twisted vision of Pete's staring eyes before he blanked out, and he tried

to call out Pete's name. But he never made it . . .

THE GIRL was slim, with a clean, youthful beauty and hair like sun-ripened wheat. The man had dark blue eyes and a dry, mahogany-tan face, cast in a bitter mould.

They sat in a light room with painted walls, on white-enameled chairs.

The girl said, "A patsy—? What's a patsy, Sergeant?

"Johnny was. It's a—oh, a fall guy, the sap in the middle, a stooge." He shrugged irritably.

"A lamb?" she asked quietly, "a—sacrificial lamb?"

"That'll do, I guess. You see, the gun Johnny had in his hand was the gun that killed his brother. Shorty never got rid of it, amateur that he was. This girl who was living with him for a while, this would-be actress who posed as Shorty's wife to Johnny —she got the gun, and her boy friend took care of Shorty with that. Because they knew, by that time, that Johnny was out here to dig into it.

"And they figured he'd never get out of Gallegher's office alive. So we'd have a dead killer, but a killer, and that would close the case. And maybe get rid of Gallegher, if Johnny's aim was any good."

The girl shook her head. "It still doesn't make sense to me. Isn't there a ring, or some big organization Shorty Carter was tied up with? What did these three have to do with it."

"Pete and Shorty and Fargo—those are the only three. They're the trio who knocked off that shipment, and it was a three-way split, or was supposed to be. This Fargo and the girl had other ideas, though. Fargo posed as a man called Joe Pertula, and the girl posed as Shorty's mistreated wife. If Johnny came out of it, alive, he had two people with phony names he'd never see again, and no story to stand up in court. And the gun that had killed both Shorty and Pete. How would Johnny look to a jury, hopped up and gunning, as he was?"

"And Gallegher?"

"Just a small-time competitor."

"How did you learn all this?"

Sergeant Kransky stretched his neck muscles. "Johnny never got out of our sight since he left the jug this morning. We had a man listening in at the window outside the girl's house, and he followed Fargo and Johnny down to Gallegher's. He phoned for us to pick up the woman, and she talked, after we pointed out that *she* had never pulled a trigger. She talked and talked and talked. Women usually do, if they think there's a deal in sight."

June's face was white with strain and shock. She said quietly, "You mean you let Johnny walk into that trap?"

"That's right. We never could get a warrant to bust into Gallegher's, but any officer can investigate a disturbance. You'd be amazed just how much disturbance a forty-five can make. They were coming out of that bar like rats out of a burning house."

"But Johnny," June said. "You, too, used him for a—"

FROM THE bed, in this hospital room, Johnny Ellis said, "For a patsy. That's the sergeant for you, June."

Kransky's face seemed to soften at this first sign of consciousness from Johnny. But it was a fleeting emotion.

He said, "Rest, Punk. You've a concussion. You're lucky Al only used a sap. You don't know how damned lucky you are."

"I think I do," Johnny said. "I think I do, Sergeant. I think he kind of knocked some sense into me."

"How much sense?" Kransky asked. "Enough to listen, for a change?"

"I'm listening, Sergeant."

"Okay. I could get you some time to cool off, on any number of charges. But you got us into Gallegher's. You stooged some characters into line for us. So, maybe, if you can follow orders, all the way, I can pull a string, here and there."

"I'm waiting for the orders, Sergeant."

"Okay, Hick, go back where the grass is green. Go back to where the rain doesn't come out of a hose. Go back to people and work you understand, and wait for your call from the army, like a man."

"That's what I had in mind, Sergeant. Ask June if it isn't. But I've changed my plans, Sergeant."

"Okay, we can fix you up with about seven to fourteen years in the kind of place you've been heading for ever since—"

Johnny raised a hand, weakly. "I'm going back, Sergeant. I meant I changed my mind about going back *alone*. I want June to go with me, as my wife."

"That was a part of it," Kransky said. "You're nothing to me, without her. It's her I'm thinking of. It's the big reason why you're getting off as you are. She's the one I'm thinking of."

"We're finally on the same side of the fence, then, Sergeant," Johnny said. "Because she's the one I'm thinking of, too. This will never change."

the turn of the tide

by . . . C. S. Forester

The sea may be indifferent to man's puny deeds of violence. But its secrets are many and dark, and its judgments — darker still.

"WHAT ALWAYS beats them in the end," said Dr. Matthews, "is how to dispose of the body. But, of course, you know that as well as I do."

"Yes," said Slade. He had, in fact, been devoting far more thought to what Dr. Matthews believed to be this accidental subject of conversation than Dr. Matthews could ever guess.

"As a matter of fact," went on Dr. Matthews, warming to the subject to which Slade had so tactfully led him, "it's a terribly knotty problem. It's so difficult, in fact, that I always wonder why anyone is fool enough to commit murder."

All very well for you, thought Slade, but he did not allow his thoughts to alter his expression. *You smug, self-satisfied old ass! You don't know the sort of difficulties a man can be up against.*

"I've often thought the same," he said.

"Yes," went on Dr. Matthews, "it's the body that does it, every time. To use poison calls for special facilities, which are good enough to hang you as soon as suspicion is roused. And that sus-

When the world-famous creator of Captain Hornblower ceases to concern himself with tall ships and the glamorous sister of the Duke of Wellington a quiet English seaside vista provides all that is needed for the free and often quite terrifying exercise of a superlative mystery writing talent. Here's a murder story with a note of deep horror, grippingly told.

Copyright, 1934, by C. S. Forester

picion—well, of course, part of my job is to detect poisoning. I don't think anyone can get away with it, nowadays, even with the most dunder-headed general practitioner."

"I quite agree with you," said Slade. He had no intention of using poison.

"Well," went on Dr. Matthews, developing his logical argument, "if you rule out poison, you rule out the chance of getting the body disposed of under the impression that the victim died a natural death. The only other way, if a man cares to stand the racket of having the body to give evidence against him, is to fake things to look like suicide. But you know, and I know, that it just can't be done.

"The mere fact of suicide calls for a close examination, and no one has ever been able to fix things so well as to get away with it. You're a lawyer. You've probably read a lot of reports on trials where the murderer has tried it on. And you know what's happened to them."

"Yes," said Slade.

He certainly had given a great deal of consideration to the matter. It was only after long thought that he had, finally, put aside the notion of disposing of young Spalding and concealing his guilt by a sham suicide.

"That brings us to where we started, then," said Dr. Matthews. "The only other thing left is to try and conceal the body. And that's more difficult still."

"Yes," said Slade. But he had a perfect plan for disposing of the body.

"A human body," said Dr. Matthews, "is a most difficult thing to get rid of. That chap Oscar Wilde, in that book of his —'Dorian Gray,' isn't it?—gets rid of one by the use of chemicals. Well, I'm a chemist as well as a doctor, and *I* wouldn't like the job."

"No?" said Slade, politely.

Dr. Matthews was not nearly as clever a man as himself, he thought.

"There's altogether too much of it," said Dr. Matthews. "It's heavy, and it's bulky, and it's bound to undergo corruption. Think of all those poor devils who've tried it. Bodies in trunks, and bodies in coal-cellars, and bodies in chicken-runs. You can't hide the thing, try as you will."

Can't I? That's all you know, thought Slade, but aloud he said: "You're quite right. I've never thought about it before."

"Of course, you haven't," agreed Dr. Matthews. "Sensible people don't, unless it's an incident of their profession, as in my case.

"And yet, you know," he went on, meditatively, "there's one decided advantage about getting rid of the body altogether. You're much safer, then. It's a point which ought to interest you,

as a lawyer, more than me. It's rather an obscure point of law, but I fancy there are very definite rulings on it. You know what I'm referring to?"

"No, I don't," said Slade, genuinely puzzled.

"You can't have a trial for murder unless you can prove there's a victim," said Dr. Matthews. "There's got to be a *corpus delicti,* as you lawyers say in your horrible dog-Latin. A corpse, in other words, even if it's only a bit of one, like that which hanged Crippen. No corpse, no trial. I think that's good law, isn't it?"

"By Jove, you're right!" said Slade. "I wonder why that hadn't occurred to me before?"

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than he regretted having said them. He did his best to make his face immobile again; he was afraid lest his expression might have hinted at his pleasure in discovering another very reassuring factor in this problem of killing young Spalding. But Dr. Matthews had noticed nothing.

"Well, as I said, people only think about these things if they're incidental to their profession," he said. "And, all the same, it's only a theoretical piece of law. The entire destruction of a body is practically impossible. But, I suppose, if a man could achieve it, he would be all right. However strong the suspicion was against him, the police couldn't get him without a corpse. There might be a story in that, Slade, if you or I were writers."

"Yes," assented Slade, and laughed harshly.

There never would be any story about the killing of young Spalding, the insolent pup.

"Well," said Dr. Matthews, "we've had a pretty gruesome conversation, haven't we? And I seem to have done all the talking, somehow. That's the result, I suppose, Slade, of the very excellent dinner you gave me. I'd better push off now. Not that the weather is very inviting."

Nor was it. As Slade saw Dr. Matthews into his car, the rain was driving down in a real winter storm, and there was a bitter wind blowing.

"Shouldn't be surprised if this turned to snow before morning," were Dr. Matthew's last words before he drove off.

Slade was glad it was such a tempestuous night. It meant that, more certainly than ever, there would be no one out in the lanes, no one out on the sands when he disposed of young Spalding's body.

Back in his drawing-room Slade looked at the clock. There was still an hour to spare; he could spend it making sure that his plans were all correct.

He looked up the tide tables. Yes, that was right enough. Spring tides. The lowest of low

water on the sands. There was not so much luck about that. Young Spalding came back on the midnight train every Wednesday night, and it was not surprising that, sooner or later, the Wednesday night would coincide with a Spring tide. But it was lucky that this particular Wednesday night should be one of tempest; luckier still that low water should be at one-thirty, the best time for him.

He opened the drawing-room door and listened carefully. He could not hear a sound. Mrs. Dumbleton, his housekeeper, must have been in bed some time now. She was as deaf as a post, anyway, and would not hear his departure. Nor his return, when Spalding had been killed and disposed of.

The hands of the clock seemed to be moving very fast. He must make sure everything was correct. The plough chain and the other iron weights were already in the back seat of the car; he had put them there before old Matthews arrived to dine. He slipped on his overcoat.

From his desk, Slade took a curious little bit of apparatus: eighteen inches of strong cord, tied at each end to a six-inch length of wood so as to make a ring. He made a last close examination to see that the knots were quite firm, and then he put it in his pocket; as he did so, he ran through, in his mind, the words —he knew them by heart—of the passage in the book about the Thugs of India, describing the method of strangulation employed by them.

He could think quite coldly about all this. Young Spalding was a pestilent busybody. A word from him, now, could bring ruin upon Slade, could send him to prison, could have him struck off the rolls.

Slade thought of other defaulting solicitors he had heard of, even one or two with whom he had come into contact professionally. He remembered his brother-solicitors' remarks about them, pitying or contemptuous. He thought of having to beg his bread in the streets on his release from prison, of cold and misery and starvation. The shudder which shook him was succeeded by a hot wave of resentment. Never, never, would he endure it.

What right had young Spalding, who had barely been qualified two years, to condemn a gray-haired man twenty years his senior to such a fate? If nothing but death would stop him, then he deserved to die. He clenched his hand on the cord in his pocket.

A glance at the clock told him he had better be moving. He turned out the lights and tiptoed out of the house, shutting the door quietly. The bitter wind

flung icy rain into his face, but he did not notice it.

He pushed the car out of the garage by hand, and, contrary to his wont, he locked the garage doors, as a precaution against the infinitesimal chance that, on a night like this, someone should notice that his car was out.

He drove cautiously down the road. Of course, there was not a soul about in a quiet place like this. The few street-lamps were already extinguished.

There were lights in the station as he drove over the bridge; they were awaiting there the arrival of the twelve-thirty train. Spalding would be on that. Every Wednesday he went over to his subsidiary office, sixty miles away. Slade turned into the lane a quarter of a mile beyond the station, and then reversed his car so that it pointed towards the road. He put out the sidelights, and settled himself to wait; his hand fumbled with the cord in his pocket.

The train was a little late. Slade had been waiting a quarter of an hour when he saw the lights of the train emerge from the cutting and come to a standstill in the station. So wild was the night that he could hear nothing of it. Then the train moved slowly out again. As soon as it was gone, the lights in the station began to go out, one by one; Hobson, the porter, was making ready to go home, his turn of duty completed.

Next, Slade's straining ears heard footsteps.

Young Spalding was striding down the road. With his head bent before the storm, he did not notice the dark mass of the motor-car in the lane, and he walked past it.

Slade counted up to two hundred, slowly, and then he switched on his lights, started the engine, and drove the car out into the road in pursuit. He saw Spalding in the light of the headlamps and drew up alongside.

"Is that Spalding?" he said, striving to make the tone of his voice as natural as possible. "I'd better give you a lift, old man, hadn't I?"

"Thanks very much," said Spalding. "This isn't the sort of night to walk two miles in."

He climbed in and shut the door. No one had seen. No one would know. Slade let his clutch out, drove slowly down the road.

"Bit of luck, seeing you," he said. "I was just on my way home from bridge at Mrs. Clay's when I saw the train come in and remembered it was Wednesday and you'd be walking home. So I thought I'd turn a bit out of my way to take you along."

"Very good of you, I'm sure," said Spalding.

"As a matter of fact," said Slade, speaking slowly and driving slowly, "it wasn't altogether disinterested. I wanted to talk business to you, as it happened."

"Rather an odd time to talk business," said Spalding. "Can't it wait till tomorrow?"

"No, it cannot," said Slade. "It's about the Lady Vere trust."

"Oh, yes. I wrote to remind you last week that you had to make delivery."

"Yes, you did. And I told you, long before that, that it would be inconvenient, with Hammond abroad."

"I don't see that," said Spalding. "I don't see that Hammond's got anything to do with it. Why can't you just hand over and have done with it? I can't do anything to straighten things up until you do."

"As I said, it would be inconvenient."

Slade brought the car to a standstill at the side of the road.

"Look here, Spalding," he said desperately, "I've never asked a favor of you before. But now I ask you, as a favor, to forego delivery for a bit. Just for three months, Spalding."

But Slade had small hope that his request would be granted. So little hope, in fact, that he brought his left hand out of his pocket holding the piece of wood, with the loop of cord dangling from its ends. He put his arm round the back of Spalding's seat.

"No, I can't, really I can't," said Spalding. "I've got my duty to my clients to consider. I'm sorry to insist, but you're quite well aware of what my duty is."

"Yes," said Slade, "but I beg you to wait. I implore you to wait, Spalding. There! Perhaps you can guess why, now."

"I see," said Spalding, after a long pause.

"I only want three months," pressed Slade. "Just three months. I can get straight again in three months."

Spalding had known other men who had had the same belief in their ability to get straight in three months. It was unfortunate for Slade—and for Spalding—that Slade had used those words. Spalding hardened his heart.

"No," he said. "I can't promise anything like that. I don't think it's any use continuing this discussion. Perhaps I'd better walk home from here."

He put his hand to the latch of the door, and, as he did so, Slade jerked the loop of cord over his head. A single turn of Slade's wrist—a thin, bony, old man's wrist, but as strong as steel in that wild moment—tightened the cord about Spalding's throat.

Slade swung round in his seat, getting both hands to the piece of wood, twisting madly. His breath hissed between his teeth with the effort, but Spalding never drew breath at all. He lost consciousness long before he was dead. Only Slade's grip of the cord round his throat prevented the dead body from falling forward, doubled up.

Nobody had seen, nobody would know. And what that book had stated about the method of assassination practiced by Thugs was perfectly correct.

Slade had gained, now, the time in which he could get his affairs in order. With all the promise of his current speculations, with all his financial ability, he would be able to recoup himself for his past losses. It only remained to dispose of Spalding's body, and he had planned to do that very satisfactorily. Just for a moment Slade felt as if all this were only some heated dream, some nightmare, but then he came back to reality and went on with the plan he had in mind.

He pulled the dead man's knees forward so that the corpse lay back in the seat, against the side of the car. He put the car in gear, let in his clutch, and drove rapidly down the road—much faster than when he had been arguing with Spalding. Low water was in three-quarters of an hours' time, and the sands were ten miles away.

Slade drove fast through the wild night. There was not a soul about in those lonely lanes. He knew the way by heart, for he had driven repeatedly over that route recently in order to memorize it.

The car bumped down the last bit of lane, and Slade drew up on the edge of the sands.

It was pitch dark, and the bitter wind was howling about him, under the black sky. Despite the noise of the wind, he could hear the surf breaking far away, two miles away, across the level sands. He climbed out of the driver's seat and walked round to the other door. When he opened it the dead man fell sideways, into his arms.

With an effort, Slade held him up, while he groped into the back of the car for the plough chain and the iron weights. He crammed the weights into the dead man's pockets, and he wound the chain round and round the dead man's body, tucking in the ends to make it all secure. With that mass of iron to hold it down, the body would never be found again when dropped into the sea at the lowest ebb of Spring tide.

Slade tried now to lift the body in his arms, to carry it over the sands. He reeled and strained, but he was not strong enough—Slade was a man of slight figure, and past his prime. The sweat on his forehead was icy in the cold wind.

For a second, doubt overwhelmed him, lest all his plans should fail for want of bodily strength. But he forced himself into thinking clearly—forced his frail body into obeying the vehement commands of his brain.

He turned round, still holding the dead man upright. Stooping, he got the heavy burden on his

shoulders. He drew the arms round his neck, and, with a convulsive effort, he got the legs up round his hips. The dead man now rode him pig-a-back. Bending nearly double, he was able to carry the heavy weight in that fashion, the arms tight round his neck, the legs tight round his waist.

He set off, staggering, down the imperceptible slope of the sands towards the sound of the surf. The sands were soft beneath his feet. It was because of this softness that he had not driven the car down to the water's edge. He could afford to take no chances of being embogged.

The icy wind shrieked round him all that long way. The tide was nearly two miles out. That was why Slade had chosen this place. In the depth of winter, no one would go out to the water's edge at low tide for months to come.

He staggered on over the sands, clasping the limbs of the body close about him. Desperately, he forced himself forward, not stopping to rest, for he only had time now to reach the water's edge before the flow began. He went on and on, driving his exhausted body with fierce urgings from his frightened brain.

Then, at last, he saw it: a line of white in the darkness which indicated the water's edge. Farther out, the waves were breaking in an inferno of noise. Here, the fragments of the rollers were only just sufficient to move the surface a little.

He was going to make quite sure of things. Steadying himself, he stepped into the water, wading in farther and farther so as to be able to drop the body into comparatively deep water. He held to his resolve, staggering through the icy water, knee deep, thigh deep, until it was nearly at his waist. This was far enough. He stopped, gasping in the darkness.

He leaned over to one side, to roll the body off his back. It did not move. He pulled at its arms. They were obstinate. He could not loosen them. He shook himself, wildly. He tore at the legs round his waist. Still the thing clung to him. Wild with panic and fear, he flung himself about in a mad effort to rid himself of the burden. It clung on as though it were alive. He could not break its grip, no matter how hard he tried.

Then another breaker came in. It splashed about him, wetting him far above his waist. The tide had begun to turn now, and the tide on those sands comes in like a racehorse.

He made another effort to cast off the load, and, when it still held him fast, he lost his nerve and tried to struggle out of the sea. But it was too much for his exhausted body. The weight of the corpse and of the iron with

which it was loaded overbore him. He fell.

He struggled up again in the foam-streaked, dark sea, staggered a few steps, fell again—and did not rise. The dead man's arms were round his neck, throttling him, strangling him. Rigor mortis had set in and Spalding's muscles had refused to relax.

We think THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE *is a natural. Certainly there is no more beloved character in present-day mystery fiction than The Saint. Certainly there is no man more uniquely equipped to serve in a supervisory capacity on a detective magazine than Leslie Charteris. Most of his adult life he's been a fantastically successful spinner of mystery stories and a keen student of crime fiction.*

Make no mistake, Charteris and The Saint are oddly interchangeable—for like Simon, his author is casual and languid and manages to look like a Louis Quinze courtier even in huaraches and Bermuda shorts. It seems probable that Simon is actually the person Charteris sees when he looks in the shaving mirror.

Apart from the two-in-one phase of his existence Charteris is an editor of shrewd and unerring taste. Which is why THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE *is one of the finest magazines in the world today. If you're having trouble finding* THE SAINT *on the newsstands and want to be certain of securing it regularly every month just fill in the coupon below, and the best in new and old detective-mystery fiction will come your way.*

Next month's big issue will contain a brand-new Johnny Fletcher novel by Frank Gruber entitled MURDER AT THE RACE TRACK. *And there will be the usual fine collection of short stories by such writers as: Leslie Charteris, Ray Bradbury, T. S. Stribling, Edmund Crispin; including a Bulldog Drummond short story by H. C. McNeile and many others. This and 11 issues, a full year, at only $3.75.*

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Kindly enter my subscription for THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
One year (12 issues) at $3.75. Remit by check or money order.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY, ZONE, STATE_____

PLEASE PRINT SD 58

too many enemies

by . . . Edwin Baird

Mr. Orthwein's enemies were as numerous as a swarm of locusts. But it takes only one enemy to load and trigger a murder gun.

GROVER ORTHWEIN surveyed the crowded room with ironical detachment. "There are two persons here tonight," he said, "who would enjoy murdering me."

Rita Dickerson smiled. "*Only* two?"

"Two," he amended, "that I can be completely sure of. He glanced over his shoulder, thoughtfully. His apartment was filled with people—with music and laughter, smoke and perfume. A handsome man of forty, with an athletic build and lean, tanned face, he enjoyed being the center of this glamorous social life, enjoyed wearing the correct evening clothes that accentuated his poise, his extraordinary assurance.

"I wonder," Rita said, surveying his guests with her quiet, dark eyes, "if I can guess who the two are. I don't see your divorced wife, but I see Kay Maskey talking with Tom Hubbard, and they seem to be discussing you—"

His new butler, Jacques, approached with a tray of glasses filled with champagne. Orthwein

---

Although Edwin Baird's skillfully written and fast-moving crime yarns have entertained two generations of mystery story addicts not one of them has been a repeat performance. It was quite early in his career as an editor that Mr. Baird discovered what so many writers—even highly successful ones—often fail to realize. No two crimes are alike, and a story becomes more intensely readable when something new has been added.

motioned him away, and said impulsively: "Look, Rita. Let's get away from here, you and I."

"No!" she said quickly. Then she added: "I'm going to marry Donald Field. We are engaged."

He stared at her incredulously. "When did this happen?"

"Last night. He proposed in a taxicab."

"But why the hell," Orthwein exploded, "do you want to marry *that* fool?"

"Why the hell," she retorted angrily, "does any girl want to marry *any* fool?"

"But—"

He broke off as Kay Maskey and Tom Hubbard joined them. Pointedly ignoring Rita, Kay Maskey said to Orthwein: "Darling, you're neglecting your duty." She spoke with an affected drawl that somehow fitted her slinky figure.

Tom Hubbard, fat and florid, said heavily: "I'd like a word with you, Orthwein—alone."

"Not now, Hubbard," Orthwein said. "Miss Dickerson and I are going to dance."

As Orthwein led her to the adjoining room, Rita said: "Well, you sidestepped Suspect Number Two."

"Number One, you mean. Kay Maskey hates me only because I won't marry her, while Tom—"

"But a woman scorned, you know."

"Yes, I know. But a woman scorned isn't half as dangerous as a man fleeced. You see, my dear, Hubbard thinks I fleeced him out of fifty thousand dollars."

"And didn't you? You know," said Rita, "when I think of your affairs with women and your 'business deals' with men it amazes me that you weren't murdered long ago."

"I bear a charmed life, Rita. But tonight I am tempting Fate. Tonight I have gathered my enemies around me. There isn't a person here tonight that doesn't hate me. And not one here that I like—except you," he whispered in her ear, "and I *love* you."

"That's sweet of you," she said lightly. "But if you think your life is in danger why don't you call the police?"

Orthwein said, "See that chap over there, the one at the punch bowl with the bulldog face? That's a police detective."

Rita stared in astonishment at the beefy man with carroty nose and crotched chin, wearing a double-breasted Tuxedo that looked a size too small for him.

She didn't smile. "Then you *are* afraid."

"Of course I am. I assure you, Rita, my darling, that this may be my last night on earth."

She looked around his shoulder while they danced, her eyes on the beefy man in the Tuxedo. Suddenly she said to Orthwein, "Would you mind if I spoke to your detective?"

"Of course not. Go right ahead."

As she walked across the room a small red object on the floor caught her eye and she stopped and picked it up. It was a bit of crimson cardboard cut in the shape of a heart, through which was fastened a loop of string. On one side of the card was printed: *Affiliated Charities.* And on the other: *Have A Heart.*

She remembered then that this had been Tag Day. Solicitors had given out these tags all that day on the streets, in return for donations to charity. Some guest had dropped the tag, of course.

She still had it in her hand when she approached the detective and, smiling up at him, looped it to a buttonhole of his Tuxedo jacket.

"Tag!" she laughed. "You're it." Then she said, "How do you do, Hagerty?"

He put down his punch cup, and said, "Good evening, Miss Dickerson. I didn't know you at first."

"You've seen me only once. At Mr. Orthwein's office."

"Yeah," he said, "I remember now. You wasn't dressed up then like you are now."

She felt uncomfortable beneath his steadfast gaze. Looking down at the crimson heart she had tied to his lapel, she asked: "How is your mother, Mr. Hagerty?"

His face went blank. "My mother," he said, in a flat, hard voice, "is dead."

"Oh! I'm sorry! I didn't know . . . Had she been ill very long?"

"She hadn't been ill at all," he said. "She died sudden. *Very* sudden."

"Oh."

"She died," said Detective Hagerty, in the same hard voice, "of poison. A suicide."

There was an unpleasant pause. He was looking over her head, at the milling crowd.

"You mean . . ." she began, and stopped.

"Yeah, that's what I mean," he said harshly. "That's *exactly* what I mean."

She looked up and saw Orthwein walking toward the hall that led to his bedroom.

"Excuse me," she said, and hurried away.

Orthwein turned as she called his name. "What's up, Rita? You look as if you'd seen a couple of ghosts."

"I've just learned something—"

But now Tom Hubbard, shouldering fatly through the dancing throng, interrupted her.

"May I have this dance?" he said to Rita, and without waiting for a reply, pulled her onto the floor.

She glanced over his shoulder and saw Orthwein enter the hall leading to his bedroom. Torn with indecision, she heard Hub-

bard saying close to her ear: "You're Orthwein's secretary, aren't you?"

"I used to be his secretary."

"Then you must know something about his affairs."

"Probably more than he knows himself." Now she saw Kay Maskey enter the bedroom hall . . . Tom Hubbard's voice was continuing: "Especially that deal in Consolidated Airlines. Cost me plenty. And now Orthwein won't talk about it. Only reason I came here tonight is for a showdown with him. And before I leave, by God, I'll have it!"

The music stopped, and at the same instant she saw the new butler slipping into the bedroom hall.

"If you'll excuse me," Hubbard said, "I think I'll have that showdown now."

And then he, too, moved toward the same hall into which had gone Grover Orthwein, Kay Maskey and the new butler, Jacques.

Rita looked about for the Tuxedoed detective. He was nowhere in sight. But in the press of people she saw somebody else —somebody she had never expected to see here—and her heart pounded furiously as she stared at her fiance, Donald Field, who had just entered the crowded drawing room.

Conspicuous in his gray sack suit, young and slim and boyish-looking, he walked impetuously forward, brushing back his brown hair with a quick, nervous hand as he looked searchingly at the crowd.

She knew he was looking for her, but he had not yet seen her. She saw him speak to the maid, saw the maid answer him, saw him turn and enter the bedroom hall.

She started swiftly after him, threading her way through the chattering throng, still looking in vain for Detective Hagerty. She entered the hall—and almost collided with Hubbard.

Hubbard's eyes bulged froggishly and his face was as white as his glazed shirt-front. He reached out a flabby hand and stopped her. "Don't go back there!" he cried. "A horrible thing has happened!"

Rita shook off his hand and hurried down the hall to an open door at the end of it. She looked inside the large bedroom with its three large windows overlooking the city. One of the windows stood open. Sprawled face down on the floor was the body of Grover Orthwein. Beside the body stood young Donald Field, holding a revolver.

Rita entered the room and closed the door behind her. "Oh, Donald! Why did you do it?"

Donald never took his eyes from the dead man.

"I asked you not to come here, Rita. I *begged* you not to come."

"Never mind that now. We must get rid of that thing in your hand." She took the revolver and started to hurl it through the open window. In that instant she heard the door open behind her and a voice saying quietly:

"I wouldn't do that if I were you."

It was Detective Hagerty. He came toward her, took the gun from her hand, and leaned down and looked at Orthwein.

"Which of you killed him?" he asked.

"I did," said Rita.

"She's lying," Donald cried out. "I killed him!"

"You did, hey?" Detective Hagerty examined the revolver, then slid it into his coat pocket. "You sit over here, Miss Dickerson. And you," he said to Donald, "sit over there."

Donald Field sat down. But Rita stepped to the bed and jerked off its coverlet. "You don't mind, do you, if I spread this over him?" Before the detective could answer, she covered Orthwein's body.

Detective Hagerty said, "I've a few questions to ask you two before I call headquarters."

A sharp knock on the door interrupted him and he opened it. The sound of merriment in the front room rose sharply. She heard the detective say, "All three of you come in here," and saw Tom Hubbard and Kay Maskey enter the room, followed by Jacques.

Jacques looked at the covered form on the floor. There was no expression in his ophidian eyes, and Rita, watching him, saw he was concealing something beneath his black coat.

Hagerty closed the door and stood with his back to it.

Kay Maskey, her hard blue eyes distended, stared at the covered mound on the floor. *"What is that?"*

"It's the dead body of Grover Orthwein," Detective Hagerty told her. "Sit down." He shoved a chair forward.

Jacques withdrew his hand from his coat and Rita saw, with a start, that the thing he had been hiding was her silver-mesh evening bag. She saw him hand it to the detective and stand on tiptoe and whisper something into the policeman's ear. Detective Hagerty, head inclined sidewise, nodded, then held the bag up.

"Whose property is this?" he asked.

"It's mine," said Rita.

She saw Hagerty open the bag and take out a small, pearl-handled revolver.

Kay Maskey sat forward, staring wide-eyed at the weapon. Detective Hagerty examined the cylinder, held the muzzle to his nose and said pleasantly to Rita, "So you didn't use the other gun. You used this one."

Rita said nothing. She was looking at Kay. The blood had drained from Kay's face, leaving it deathly white, except for a splash of rouge.

"Hello!" the detective said, eying the pearl handle. "Here's some initials—K. M." He looked at Kay. "Those are *your* initials," he said, accusingly.

Kay Maskey emitted a brittle laugh. "Of course, they're mine. And so is the revolver." She sent a venomous look at Jacques standing woodenly beside the officer. "But *I* never used it. Can't you see that somebody stole it, used it to shoot Mr. Orthwein, then 'planted' it in Miss Dickerson's bag?"

"And who," mildly asked Detective Hagerty, "would want to do all that?"

"The man who would want to do it—and the man who *did* do it—is standing right there beside you."

Detective Hagerty looked down at the diminutive butler. "How about that?" he said to the servant.

The butler spoke with a peculiar foreign accent. "Maid geeve me dees teeng. I geeve him you. Dees all I know."

Detective Hagerty frowned. "What's your name?"

"Jacques Maracek."

"What nationality?"

"French-Polish."

Hagerty stroked his jagged jaw, scowled at Kay, at Donald, then at Rita, and finally at Jacques Maracek. "At first," he said slowly, as if to himself, "this looked like an open-and-shut case." Suddenly he whirled on Tom Hubbard, who sat on the bed nervously chewing a thick cigar. "Mr. Orthwein told me tonight you was his Enemy Number One. What you got to say to that?"

"I've nothing to say to that," Hubbard roared, lumbering to his feet, his round face flushing. "You're running things here with a pretty high hand, Mr. Copper."

"Calm down!" Hagerty ordered. "You want to alarm the folks out there?" Then he barked: "Was you in this room tonight?"

Tom Hubbard barked back: "I was!"

Hagerty looked at Donald Field, then said to the others: "I got something private to say to this young fellow so I'm askin' you four to step into the other bedrooms. Miss Maskey, you come first. Oh, by the way," he suddenly asked, "was you in this room tonight?"

"I certainly was," Kay Maskey answered. "About three hours ago."

"But you came back again."

"I came back again, found the door closed, and when nobody answered my knock, I went away."

"Where'd you go?"

"I went to the next bedroom and powdered my nose."

"I see." The detective looked at her shining nose as he said to Rita: "On second thought, Miss Dickerson, I'll ask you to step out first."

He conducted Rita to a guest chamber across the hall, locked the door as he left her there.

She stood a moment listening to the faint sound of the piano at the front of the apartment, the voices riotously singing. Then she turned to the telephone between the twin beds, lifted the receiver and began to dial . . .

Thirty minutes later—she had counted the minutes on her watch as she paced the floor—she heard a key grate in the lock and saw Detective Hagerty push the door open and enter the room. His face was solemn.

"I got bad news for you, Miss Dickerson. Your intended husband, Donald Field, has confessed he killed your former employer. Says he was jealous of Orthwein's attentions to you."

Two men suddenly appeared in the doorway, and Detective Hagerty broke off and stared at them in surprise.

"Good evening, Commissioner. Howdy, Coroner. I didn't expect you so soon."

"Got a phone call at my home," said Police Commissioner Dennis McQuade, "so I picked up the coroner and came along. Who is this young lady? And just where is the body?"

"This is Miss Dickerson, sir, the dead man's secretary. The body is across the hall."

Detective Hagerty led the way. Rita followed. She saw the guests milling about at the end of the hall, a policeman preventing their entrance into the hallway. The music had ceased. The fifteen-room apartment was vibrant with excitement, subdued voices. She entered the death room ahead of the three men.

Commissioner McQuade said to Detective Hagerty, "Round up everybody connected with this case, bring 'em all to this room."

Hagerty departed and returned with Tom Hubbard, Kay Maskey, Donald Field, and the scowling Jacques Maracek. The commissioner asked them to be seated. The coroner, Adolph Schultz, was lifting the bedspread from Orthwein's body.

The commissioner stopped him. "Never mind that now, Adolph. First I want to hear this young woman's story."

Rita said, "I told Mr. Hubbard tonight that I knew a great deal about Mr. Orthwein's business—"

"One moment," the commissioner interrupted. "What was Mr. Orthwein's business?"

"He was a promoter, with a bad reputation and many enemies, one of whom was Mr. Hubbard. Mr. Hubbard hated him because of a matter of fifty thousand dol-

lars he'd lost in one of Mr. Orthwein's schemes. But there was another person who hated him even more, because of a ten thousand dollar loss. A comparatively small amount, but it was the savings of a lifetime. This person came here tonight, shot Mr. Orthwein with two revolvers, dropped one on the floor and hid the other in my handbag. Mr. Hubbard came in, saw Mr. Orthwein's body, and ran away in panic. Then Donald Field arrived. But instead of running away, Donald foolishly picked up the gun—"

"Excuse me, Chief," Detective Hagerty put in, "but I got a confession from Donald Field."

"Nice work, Hagerty," the chief said. "But let's hear Miss Dickerson's story. Go on," he said to Rita.

Rita went on: "When I found Donald standing there with the gun I supposed he had killed Mr. Orthwein—and Donald supposed I had. And when Officer Hagerty found us both—"

"Yes, yes. Get back to this person who lost the ten grand, Miss Dickerson. Who is he?"

Rita looked at Coroner Schultz. "Mr. Coroner, will you open Mr. Orthwein's right hand and give the commissioner what you find there?"

In a silence so absolute that the breathing of Fat Tom Hubbard could be clearly heard, Coroner Schultz knelt beside the body and took a small object from the dead man's hand. He handed it to the police chief.

"The reason Mr. Orthwein was killed," she continued, "was because the widowed mother of the murderer lost her life's savings in one of Mr. Orthwein's enterprises, then she committed suicide because of her loss."

"And this?" the commissioner held up for all to see what was found in the dead man's hand—a bit of crimson cardboard cut in the shape of a heart.

"That," she said, "is what Mr. Orthwein seized when he grasped the lapel of his killer, as he fell. You will notice that is just half of the tag. The other half is still in the lapel buttonhole of the murderer . . ."

And she pointed to the bit of string tied to the coat of Detective Hagerty and the torn bit of red cardboard that dangled from it.

Incredible as it may seem, that little elf you've observed peering over your shoulder is straight out of THE SAINT'S *companion magazine,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *September issue now on sale. Right now he's urging you not to miss an astounding crime drama on a cosmic scale, in a world where spacemen are as real as the traffic officer on the corner. It's called* THE CARTELS JUNGLE, *and its brilliant young author, Irving E. Cox, Jr., has never written a more compelling yarn. And there are other unusual stories in the issue.*

no smoking

by . . . Hugh Wiley

To James Lee opium smuggling was a peculiarly vicious criminal activity. So he framed a motto: "Only a dead snake stays straight."

ON FRIDAY morning in San Francisco, James Lee summoned two of his assistants, Riley and Wilbur, to his Grant Avenue apartment.

"They're letting Joe Maletti off the Rock tomorrow," he said. "He will be deported, but you know his record as well as I do. Have your men tail him day and night until he gets out of the country. Hong Kong and Macao are loaded with opium."

He paused an instant, then went on: "Spot Maletti's visitors. The Immigration people will get the links on him as soon as Alcatraz lets him go. But they're only riding him to Canada. He'll probably be at work again a week after Immigration delivers him across the line. California is short on hop and you can be sure Maletti won't overlook a bet. Let me have daily reports on him until Vancouver reports him in."

A week after Joe Maletti was turned over to the Canadian authorities and Vancouver lost his trail. Vancouver's report of failure wound up with a hopeless

San Francisco to Hugh Wiley is more than an historic landmark of the Old West, or even the New West of skyscrapers and hill-ascending trams. It is a wide and glowing portal to oriental adventure and skullduggery, with the mists of Hong Kong and Macao rising cold and mysterious against opal-tinted skies. You'll like this fast-paced mystery thriller by a writer whose brilliant narrative gifts have brought him well-deserved acclaim.

Copyright, 1937, by Hugh Wiley

note: *"Probably heading for New York or Yokohama, but definite information zero."*

Reading this, James Lee smiled grimly. To Riley and Wilbur ten minutes later, he said, "Open the Joe Maletti file again. He's probably back in California —maybe in San Francisco." After a moment, he added: "One angle suggests itself. Did you read yesterday's report from Hong Kong?"

Riley answered. "We read it," he said. "What's the guess?"

James Lee picked up a mimeographed news bulletin. "Listen to this," he said: " 'Architects for Mrs. Sarah Canning Stolb, wealthy and eccentric founder of the Mystic Destiny cult, have completed plans for the temple buildings to be erected in the colony of Mrs. Stolb's followers in the Santa Cruz Mountains south of San Francisco. The central edifice will be a replica of the Sea Guard Tower of Canton. This tower or temple, with its pillars and beams of teakwood lacquered and gilded, built in the time of Hung Ming, will be duplicated in every detail by Chinese craftsmen in Canton. Chinese artisans will be sent to California under bond to assist in the construction of the historic Oriental structure.' "

When he had finished reading, James Lee said: "The Sea Guard Tower is five stories high, and the roof beams in the second and third stories are very heavy—twelve-by-eighteen timbers, thirty feet long. I have a hunch, nothing else, that we might do well to look that teakwood over pretty carefully when it gets here. They would have been more adroit to have waited with their lacquer and their gold leaf until the timbers were in place."

"That stuff warps mighty bad in this climate," Riley said. "They'll have to store it some place for a year."

"Yes," James Lee agreed.

"The gilt and the lacquer mean that the timbers will be boxed carefully or wrapped some way to protect them," Wilbur offered.

James Lee smiled. "Right. But don't forget that international amenities will block the job of having a looksee out in the open. You'll have to work under cover."

"Where do you suppose they'll store the stuff?" Wilbur asked.

"It's heavy and hard to handle and it's got to be protected from the weather," James Lee suggested. "Some of the local hardwood importers will probably be asked to lease storage space."

After a moment, Riley asked: "Has Joe Maletti got anyone working in Canton?"

James Lee frowned. "You forget that old Yut Sung and his millionaire son-in-law, Chang

Wing are still operating. They've furnished Maletti with five million dollars' worth of stuff in the past. I'd say offhand that Yut Sung will be on the job at his end of the line. I've asked Hong Kong for a weekly report on his opium stocks."

Within the week, justifying James Lee's accurate prediction, old Yut Sung left his house in Hong Kong and caught a steamer for the thirty-five-mile trip to Macao. He was met in the Boa Vista Hotel by two Europeans who took him at once to the office of the Double Treasure gambling house.

A fan-tan game with fifty patrons in the front room received a casual glance from Yut Sung, and then a gamble for heavier stakes engaged him, and it wasn't until he'd spent an hour at the tables that he got down to business in the sanctuary of the Double Treasure office.

"The price for immediate delivery?" he asked. There was some haggling, and then, "A sample of the opium! he demanded. When this had been furnished and after he had inspected it his mood mellowed.

It is of good quality," he agreed. "I will pay the price you request."

"The place of delivery?" he was asked.

"The house of the Blackwood Cutters' Guild on Tai Sun Street in Canton."

The transaction accomplished, Yut Sung returned to his Hong Kong house. To his son-in-law, Chang Wing, he boasted: "I have made a good bargain today. It remains for you to see that our profits are not lost."

On the day following, to James Lee's apartment on Grant Avenue, there came a message in code. Translated, it read: *"Yut Sung made large purchase opium Macao stop Immediate delivery Canton."*

To his assistants, Wilbur and Riley, James Lee announced, "Yut Sung is on the job again. It probably means that Maletti has resumed operations at this end. Yut Sung is taking delivery at Canton. Maybe our guess about the teakwood beams for the Sea Guard Tower will ring the bell."

Routine work on a dozen other cases occupied Wilbur and Riley for seven weeks, and then one night a Chinese man stepped out of a darkened doorway in Chinatown to confront James Lee.

"Death comes now," the man said in guttural Cantonese.

James Lee felt the muzzle of a pistol against his ribs.

"The place of your departure from life is in the Cavern of Silence in Gamblers' Alley," the guttural voice warned.

"What if I prefer to meet death here?" James Lee asked.

"Be silent!"

"There is a time for silence,"

Lee said, calmly. "This is not the time. What has your master paid you for this job?"

"Enough. Be silent!"

"I will purchase my life with yours," James Lee suggested quietly. "There are two men behind us and another man is crossing the street directly toward us. Put your gun away if you desire to live."

The killer faltered. "He said your guards would not accompany you tonight. He said that you would be out alone."

"He is a notorious liar, this master of yours. I know him well."

"You know him!"

"Yes—I know Maletti," James Lee said instantly. "Now, you poor treacherous dog, if I am right, come with me and I will buy my life with more gold than your master gave you to destroy it."

"Who am I to question the Will of Heaven?"

"What did Maletti promise you?"

"One hundred dollars."

"In cash or in the drug of dreams?"

"Thou art of deep perception."

"Come quietly with me," James Lee directed. "Two five-tael tins! Opium of a quality fit for the governor of a province shall be your reward."

At his apartment from a cache of evidence reaped in an opium raid of the previous year, James Lee presented his acquaintance of the evening with two tins of opium. Still speaking Cantonese, he said: "Accept these as a trophy of our encounter. And now, what are your plans?"

"First of all, master, I shall forget tonight and this world in the vapors of your princely gift."

"Naturally. And then?"

"Who knows?" the Cantonese asked hopefully. "I could not serve you?"

"Rotten wood cannot be carved."

"I would work very faithfully for you."

"I fear that your pledges can be bought," James Lee said curtly. "There is a possibility that you will communicate presently with the man who hired you to destroy me. You would do well to avoid him for a while. If you ever see him—"

The telephone bell on James Lee's desk interrupted him. Ten seconds later, Riley was saying into the phone: "Listen carefully. Yut Sung has sent his son-in-law, Chang Wing, to San Francisco. He is in an apartment within a block of your place."

"Thank you," was the instant reply. "What else?"

"Another Chinaman is with him. Wilbur thinks he is one of the shrimp crew."

"Probably. Get a couple of

men on the job—Sabin and Parrish if they're free. Come and see me in half an hour."

"Right—at nine forty-five."

Jim Riley hung up the phone. James Lee turned to his visitor and completed his interrupted statement. "If you ever see Maletti, tell him, for me, that a stone lion does not fear the rain." James Lee's eyes narrowed. Hard lines lay at the corners of his mouth. "Tell him that he owes me for the lives of two men—and that I shall collect the debt. That is all. Now go your way."

At the doorway of the apartment the man hesitated. "A wise man understands a nod," he said. "Master, I will work faithfully. I will repay your favor."

"Be gone!" James Lee interrupted harshly. "Over the gates of hell is written, 'You repent too late.' "

When the man had left, James Lee returned to his library. He summoned his servant. "A glass of sherry," he said.

A sudden black reaction claimed him. For a brief moment it seemed that a fatigue, born of an overwhelming sense of futility, would stay the energy, the power of action, that characterized his constant struggle with each succeeding crew of criminals.

Then under the influence of the warming sherry, zest for the intricate game against the foes of society returned. Alert confidence marked his demeanor when, ten minutes later, he greeted his assistant.

"Sabin is on the job tonight," Riley reported. "Parrish relieves him at eight o'clock in the morning."

"Fair enough," James Lee said. "We have some plans to make. The presence of Yut Sung's son-in-law indicates that we can begin the job of spotting his customers."

Riley nodded. What's your last report on the teakwood timber shipment?" he asked.

"Hong Kong reported a dozen junks out of Macao ten days ago. The timbers for the Sea Guard Tower have been shipped. Three or four weeks more, and we stage the big raid. Now let's frame the program for Yut Sung's advance agent. I can't spare Sabin and Parrish on that job after next week."

Within the month, through his various agencies of information, James Lee confirmed his belief that Maletti was back of this latest narcotic project.

To Riley and Wilbur, planning the next moves in the game, he reported: "The Continental Hardwood Company will handle the timbers for the Sea Guard Tower. Incidentally, they will get the contract for erecting the structure."

"I thought that work was to

be done by Chinese labor," Riley said.

"The Continental people will have the contract," Lee repeated. "They will use their own equipment for heavy lifting. The Chinese artisans will put the finishing touches to the structure after it is assembled. We'll need some time to look the timbers over at the Continental plant."

"How do we get in without Maletti knowing it?" Wilbur asked.

"That's your job," James Lee said. "I suggest that you plant a couple of agitators in the company's yards and promote a walkout. If you get the yards shut down see that the police department covers the picket line with their men. You, Riley, can see that the watchmen on the night shift are on our pay roll. If we're lucky, and if we find the stuff, we can round up the entire shipment in one night's work."

"What about rounding up Maletti?" Wilbur asked.

"We use the opium as bait if we find it. We'll bring it to my apartment here. From there on we'll see what happens."

On the night of the raid in the deserted storage yard of the Continental Hardwood Company, a quarter-inch electric drill in James Lee's hands bit its way through two inches of hardwood and then raced free without resistance.

Within an hour, after a quick series of borings, James Lee said to Riley: "They've evidently been systematic about it. The cavities are eight inches wide and two feet long at the quarter points of the beams. Open them up seven feet from each end. Don't mar the main timber any more than you have to. Split the two-inch covers and rip them off."

"I'll do that," Riley said.

An hour before dawn James Lee said to Riley and Wilbur, "It's a good thing that you two 'watchmen' drove your big cars tonight. Eight thousand five-tael tins will just about be a full cargo for you."

At seven o'clock that morning, with the treasure of opium stored in his apartment on Grant Avenue, James Lee suggested, smiling at Riley and Wilbur, "Get some sleep now. Report back here at noon. We'll probably have a lead on Maletti by that time."

For a while thereafter, James Lee could find nothing in the reports from his foreign agents to indicate that Maletti and Yut Sung had made any move to repair the loss they had sustained in the capture of the opium that had been shipped in the timbers for the Sea Guard Tower. The cables in code from Hong Kong reported business as usual in the Macao factories.

"They're playing safe," Riley suggested to James Lee. "Maybe

the Japanese market is absorbing all of the stuff."

"As nearly as Hong Kong can figure it there has been a factory surplus of thirty per cent for the past six weeks. Who is getting it?"

Riley shook his head. "Search me, Chief," he said. "That's your business."

James Lee smiled thinly. "Right now as part of my business I'll make a guess," he said.

"What's the guess?"

"In the first place it isn't characteristic of Maletti or of Yut Sung to quit after losing the first bet. You know that old stuff as well as I do. Lose a dollar and bet two. Double the bets to cover your losses."

"So what?"

"They're half a million to the bad on the last play. It's probable that there's another million-dollar cargo under way."

Riley scowled. "It's a cinch they can't try the teakwood beam trick again."

"Right. They'll probably fall back on the old rush system."

"Honolulu transfer to an American ship?"

"All of that is blocked," James Lee said. "We've got to watch for some tramp steamer drifting up from South America. They'll probably have a try at that play. It's old, but it works oftener than anything else."

At four o'clock in the afternoon under a dripping gray fog, convoyed by half of the power boats of the fishing fleet, the *Sandala,* six thousand tons and red with rust, cleared Point Bonita and came through the Golden Gate under a slow bell. Beyond the great span of the Golden Gate Bridge a signal for dead slow rang into her engine room. Three rumbling notes from the *Sandala's* whistle punctuated the wailing fog signal on Alcatraz.

The ship hung in the tide due south of Lime Point for twenty minutes and then, out of the fog, quartering in to her starboard side, there came a fifty-foot power launch. Up forward on the *Sandala* a tarpaulin, ripped away from a bit of cargo, revealed a stack of five-gallon oil tins.

A cargo winch coughed free of condensed steam and a moment later a slingload of the oil tins went over the side to the deck of the power launch. Three slingloads and the work was done. The signal for half speed ahead rang down to the *Sandala's* engine room.

On a night when the *Sandala* was a thousand miles out on her trip to Japan, disappointed with the narcotic reports from his various agencies of information in California, James Lee resolved to do a little exploring in the local colony of his countrymen. An hour after he had penetrated into Chinatown, encountering old Moy Gar, who had been a

pork butcher, James Lee remarked the quiet demeanor of the elder Chinese man.

"Kwan Yin has smiled upon you?" James Lee asked after a felicitous salutation.

Old Moy Gar blinked his narrow eyes. "Only coarse rice to eat. I have enough of that. My bended arm for a pillow, these rags that I wear—what more could I demand from Kwan Yin and Milo Fo?"

A sweetish acrid odor of opium, more pronounced than usual, lay in the dead air of Moy Gar's basement.

"Long life, sons to mourn at your grave," James Lee said quickly. "I would enjoy the honor of a prolonged visit with you so that I might benefit from the wisdom of your words. But at the moment guests await me at my house."

James Lee's guests were Jim Riley and Frank Wilbur. "Old Moy Gar is smoking first-class stuff again," he said, greeting his two assistants. "If he can afford it, it means the price is down. Maletti and Yut Sung have probably turned the trick. Moy Gar was reeking with opium, stupid with it."

"What's the program?"

"First of all, we'll have a look at the shacks on Suisun Bay—the north shore. The man Maletti hired to kill me came from that fish camp."

"Tonight?"

"Right now," James Lee announced. "We'll take my car and cross from Martinez to Benicia. I'll be with you in ten minutes. I want to get into some old clothes and drape a gun under my left arm."

When Riley and Wilbur had left the apartment James Lee walked to the desk in his library. From a sealed carton of cigarettes that lay in a locked drawer of the desk he took an unopened package. He dropped both the cigarettes and the package in the right-hand pocket of his coat. In his bedroom, from a case containing a collection of pistols and revolvers he selected a short-barreled .30-caliber automatic.

Leaving his apartment, he wore this gun in a shoulder holster under his left armpit.

At the curb where the car was waiting, he ordered, "Let's go. You might as well drive, Wilbur. Head for Martinez and keep her rolling."

Frank Wilbur nodded. "Then where do we go from there?"

"We'll follow around to the north shore of Suisun Bay as far as we can."

"That fish camp—the Sea Treasure Company?"

"That's it, but we'll stop half a mile before we get there. I want to prowl into that joint on foot."

Now Riley asked a question: "Have you got anything definite on the fish joint?"

"Fairly definite," James Lee answered. "Maletti paid a Cantonese man to rub me out a few weeks ago. I did a little trading with him. There's some mighty good opium in Chinatown tonight. I think perhaps the Sea Treasure shacks are hot territory."

At midnight, four miles north of Benicia, where the railroad swings to the right from the highway toward Fairfield, he said to Wilbur, "We'll stop here. You stay with the car. You will come with me, Riley, as far as the railroad track. If you hear any shooting both of you will close in as fast as you can. It will probably mean that I need help and need it badly."

Leaving Riley at the railroad embankment, in the darkness James Lee walked east until he came to the first tidal channel of the complex system of waterways that threaded the slough north of Suisun Bay. In the faint starlight he explored the swampland northward for a thousand feet until he came to a narrow footbridge that led eastward to the open waters of the bay. His pathway was a series of ten-inch, planks, some of them warped and twisted by the weather.

The going, difficult enough in daylight, was acutely hazardous. The tide was out and a spill from the footwalk would have meant nothing more than a ten-foot fall into the mud of the swamp. But there were several important reasons why the midnight prowler used every precaution to avoid falling.

As he remembered the layout, there was less than eight hundred feet of the rickety footwalk to be traversed. When he had covered three-fourths of the way a noise up ahead brought a picture of the problem that he would face in an encounter with a pedestrian bound in the opposite direction. He halted, listening for a moment.

"If there is someone coming," he reflected. "I'll swing down underneath and hold tightly to one of those barnacle-covered pilings until he passes."

After a moment, reassured by silence, he resumed his journey. Presently, looming large in the meager starlight, fifty feet ahead of him he saw the first of the ramshackle structures wherein the Chinese fishing crew lived and worked. He remembered that there was a wider walk leading to the left somewhere up ahead and that this walk ended on a platform that surrounded the half-dozen shacks of the establishment.

"The third building to the left —headquarters," he recalled. "Two windows and a door on the west front. A fifty-foot platform east of it." He came to the wide walk and turned to his left. Three seconds later, up ahead, lighted windows marked the

main building. "I wonder if they have an alarm system rigged," he mused.

On the instant there was no further need for surmise. The door swung open and a brilliant beam from a flashlight cut through the dark and blinded him.

"Hola!" he said. *"K'u chin t'ien lai.* Sweet after bitter, to have found sanctuary."

The voice of a man speaking Cantonese bade him advance. "Who comes at this late hour?"

"A traveler, weary and torn with hunger and thirst."

"Enter this house. You are welcome to food and drink."

James Lee walked through the doorway of the shack. He faced two Chinese men. One of them bowed to him. "Good evening, Mr. Lee," he said. "You do not know me. I am Chang Wing."

From a dark corner of the room, another voice spoke: "And never mind the shooting, Mr. Lee. I'll do plenty for both of us."

It was the voice of Joe Maletti.

James Lee turned toward the shadows. "I wanted to have a talk with you, Joe," he said. "I thought I'd find you here."

"Listen, feller, I'll do the talking." Maletti walked into the center of the room. There was a long blue .45 automatic in his right hand, and to Chang Wing and his companion he rasped, "Get out of here! I want no witnesses to what's coming. Come back when I call you and not before—unless the signal bell rings."

Maletti turned again to James Lee. "Wise guy, ain't you? Didn't you feel that thread across your ankles fifty feet out from shore?"

James Lee smiled. "That was slick work," he said. "Those rigs are good when they work."

"This one worked," Maletti said. "Did that hophead tongster tip this joint off?"

James Lee shook his head. "This joint has been hot territory for a long time."

"It's going to be too hot for you."

"Maybe not."

"Too hot for you, I said! You're not singlehanded tonight, but your foot slipped on one bet. You might have an army back of you on land, but the bay is clear. I know that much."

"I don't need an army, Maletti. I'll admit that you're a good thief, but after all you're nothing but a thief."

"Cut that out right now or I'll blast if it costs me—"

"If it costs you half a million? That's a high price to pay for one shot. That's why I came over here tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen, Joe, you don't think a man gets rich in this game of mine, do you?"

"I know one of them in your game that ain't gonna get rich. He's gonna get bumped and mucked. You're going to take a trip at high tide till the fish eat you. You'll be a skeleton in rags by the time you hit the Golden Gate."

"I'll give you a wave when I pass Alcatraz. You'll be back on the Rock, Joe, by the time I drift that far."

Maletti snarled: "One more crack like that and you get it through the neck! Lee, tonight you're going to choke to death on your own blood!"

James Lee smiled. "That's a pleasant thought, but I don't want to talk of those things. I came over here to make a deal with you."

"Deal for what?"

"Well, let's start with a half a million dollars worth of opium."

"Burned up by this time."

"Wrong again. It's parked away safely in my apartment in San Francisco."

Maletti looked puzzled. "I heard that but I thought the punk was lying to me."

"It's the truth. Suppose I ante that shipment for a fourth interest in the business? You and Yut Sung doubled your bet on your second consignment, didn't you?"

"You know too much," said Maletti.

"My men tell the truth. A fourth interest. How about it?"

"And you stay under cover?"

"I wouldn't last a day out in the open."

Maletti was silent for a moment and then, half to himself, he said, "If you move out it would put a crimp in the works that would let us clean up big in the next year. There's only one hitch. I might ride, but the other two—"

"You mean old Yut Sung and this flashlight artist?" James Lee asked.

"That's Chang Wing, his son-in-law," said Maletti.

"I know it. How about letting me handle that end of the trouble?"

Maletti hesitated.

James Lee reached into his pocket for the package of cigarettes that he carried. He ripped the outer wrapper from the package and dropped it on the floor.

Maletti saw him tear away the paper and the foil from one end of the package.

"Lay off of them quick moves —frisking yourself," he said. "I've let you keep your rods on you so far. Don't scare me that way again."

James Lee selected a cigarette. "You mind if I reach in my vest pocket for a match?"

"Reach and be damned," said Maletti.

James Lee held the package of

cigarettes toward Maletti. "Have a cigarette?" he invited.

Maletti took a cigarette and tapped it on the arm of his chair.

James Lee lighted a match and held it out to Maletti.

"Never mind that match, Lee. I got matches of my own. Don't get too close to me."

James Lee nodded. He lighted his own cigarette.

Maletti put his cigarette in his mouth and reached for a match. Before he found one his head fell forward. A second later he crumpled in the chair where he sat. The gun dropped from his hand to the floor.

James Lee picked it up. Standing beside Maletti for a moment, he said half aloud, "Poor, crooked fool. I had to do it."

He held the automatic away from him then, and fired a shot through the roof of the shack.

There was a sound of pattering felt slippers. When Chang Wing came through the door, James Lee swung the .45 straight in line for the man's heart. "Only a dead snake is straight," he said in Cantonese, firing as he spoke.

To the man behind the dead Chang Wing, Lee said, "You have served an evil master. For you perhaps repentance may come in time to save your life. Speak the truth now! Where is the black gum of dreams, the treasure of opium that these men brought in?"

Cringing with fear, the man cried out, "It's in an iron tank under this room. Tins of oil were emptied to provide—"

"I know that. Where is it?"

"An opening in the floor behind you. A ladder leads downward—"

"Silence! Show me!" James Lee commanded.

The trembling man lifted a grass mat on the floor, revealing a hinged door. He raised this door. "It's dark below," he said.

"Enough for the moment. Close the door to this room. Now wait where you are."

Seven minutes and then, answering Jim Riley's hail through the darkness, James Lee answered, "All safe! Come ahead."

Riley came into the room where the two dead men lay.

"Maletti and Chang Wing," James Lee announced. "Dead. The dope is down below. Get the links on this fellow and hold him while I have a looksee."

Jim Riley coughed violently, saying, "Chief, I've been on pins and needles. In a pinch I wouldn't trust that poison cigarette trick as far as I could throw a bull by the tail. You've got to play heavy poker to put it over."

James Lee smiled grimly. "Hydrocyanic crystals always work," he said. "But you've got to be careful to pick the right cigarette for yourself and leave the nineteen loaded ones for your playmate."

the potsherd of anubis

by . . . Sax Rohmer

The archeologist's knavery hardly seemed justified. So the famed Moris Klaw permitted his cloak to cast a long Egyptian shadow.

IN EXAMINING the abundant material which the genius, the courtesy, and I'm afraid I must add, the eccentricity, of Moris Klaw placed at my disposal—several unusual facts struck me as meriting a few words of speculative appraisal.

For instance, a surprising number of cases in which he was concerned centered about curios and relics of various kinds. He was, I think, primarily an antiquarian and I'm inclined to suspect that his preference for such cases had a great deal to do with his love of the past, and his quite remarkable scholarship.

Then again, no two of his acquaintances could agree on the significance of the few facts which might have shed some light, however faint, on his actual identity. He was a master of disguise, and the great secret of his life was one which he jealously guarded from friends and enemies alike.

Was the Moris Klaw who kept the curio-shop in Wapping the real Moris Klaw? And to what extent did he seriously believe in

Having stalked across our pages but two short months ago with scarcely a bow to our readers—he was far too busy unraveling one of the eeriest of crime mysteries—Sax Rohmer's disquieting genius of a sleuth returns here for a curtain call, and the safe prediction that if the next five decades of detective fiction see another Sherlock Holmes, and geraniums in bloom on Baker Street then, and then only, will there be a second Moris Klaw.

Copyright, 1915, 1943, by Sax Rohmer

the astounding psychic phenomena upon which his methods were supposedly based?

As having particular relevance to this aspect of the mystery I have selected for narration here the case of the Potsherd of Anubis. Since the Boswell in accounts of this kind has often appeared, to my mind, to outshine the Johnson, I have decided to present the startling and often terrifying sequence of events in the words of Mr. J. E. Wilson Clifford, electrical engineer, of Copthall House, Copthall Avenue, E.C., London, to whom I am indebted for a most provocative and exciting factual history of the case.

I do not think I could improve upon his account, and I hardly need add that it is always a pleasure to bring to a discerning, mystery audience source material as absorbing as this, about the man of disquieting genius I knew so well. Mr. Clifford's narrative follows.

I

During most of that autumn I had the good fortune to share a pleasant set of rooms with Dr. Mark Lesty, who was shortly to become a resident physician at a London hospital. It was, I think during the last week of October that the extraordinary affair of Halesowen and his Egyptian potsherd came to our attention.

Our rooms—they were in a modest southwest suburb—overlooked a fine expanse of Common. Halesowen had rented an apartment commanding a similar prospect, and at the time of which I write he had just returned from a six month's visit to Egypt.

Halesowen was a tall, scholarly-looking man, with a Churchillian rosiness of complexion, who dressed rather sedately and wore his hair cropped close to his head. He was widely traveled and no mean antiquary. He lived entirely by himself, and Lesty and I frequently spent the evening at his place, which was virtually a museum of curiosities.

I have a very clear recollection of the first time that he showed us his latest acquisitions. Both the windows were wide open, and I can distinctly remember that the awning fluttered in the slight breeze, and that dusk was just descending. We had fallen silent, and we sat puffing contentedly at our briers, and looking out over the Common.

We had been examining the relics that Halesowen had brought back from the land of the Pharaohs. One treasure in particular had profoundly impressed me, layman though I was—the gruesomely shriveled mummy of a sacred cat from Bubastis.

"It wouldn't have been worth bringing back if it were not for the wrapping," Halesowen had

remarked. "But here is a windfall which is really unique!"

The object which he referred to was a pale green, broken potsherd upon which was inscribed a number of hieroglyphics, and an astonishingly lifelike figure with the head of a jackal.

"A vase bearing the divine image of Anubis!" he explained. "It may interest you to know it's extremely valuable."

"Why?" Lesty inquired in his casually indolent way.

"For several reasons," Halesowen replied. "In the first place, the characters of the inscription are entirely unfamiliar to me. I believe them to be a sort of secret writing, possibly peculiar to some pre-dynastic brotherhood. I am risking expert opinion, although with rather high-handed effrontery, perhaps unworthy of a serious scholar, I stole the thing."

"How's that?" I asked, startled.

"Well, Professor Sheraton—you'll see his name on a row of cases in the British Museum—excavated it. But it's a moral certainty he never intended to advise the authorities of his find. He was going to smuggle it out of Egypt into his private collection. I had marked the spot where he found it for inquiries of my own. The dishonest old coot—"

Lesty laughed.

"Oh, my own motives weren't above criticism," Halesowen acknowledged generously. "But anyway Sheraton anticipated me. Accordingly I employed a light-fingered native lad named Ali, a distinguished member of a family of thieves, to visit the professor's tent. To cut the story short—here's the potsherd with its Anubis image intact."

"I'm profoundly shocked," drawled Lesty. "You'll come to a bad end, young fellow."

"He surely will," I agreed.

"My position is a peculiar one," replied Halesowen, smiling. "Neither Sheraton nor I had any legal claim to the sherd while we were on Egyptian territory. Therefore, even if Sheraton discovered that I had the thing—and I was sure he would—he'd hardly be in a position to prosecute me."

"Hardly," agreed Lesty.

"Yes. But remember we were well off the map—miles away from Cook's route. The possession of this potsherd would have aroused the envy and covetousness of any Egyptologist with even a slight trace of the old Adam in him.

"Curiously enough, a third party actually did have his eye on the place where the sherd was found. And in some mysterious fashion he tumbled to the fact that it had fallen into *my* hands.

He made me a tactfully veiled offer of a hundred pounds for it. I refused. But then a week or so later I ran across him again in

Cairo, and he raised his price to two hundred."

"That's strange," I said. "Who was he?"

"He called himself Zeda—Dr. Louis Zeda," Halesowen replied. "He went into a rage when I declined to sell, and I haven't set eyes on him since."

Halesowen relocked the fragment in his cabinet, and we lapsed into silence. For ten or twelve minutes we sat gazing meditatively across the Common, picturesque in the dim, autumn twilight. Then I said: "By the way, Halesowen, I see that the apartment next door is to let."

"Yes, it's been vacant for some time," he replied. "Why don't you lads take it?"

"We'll think about it," yawned Lesty, stretching his long limbs luxuriously. "We've been paying a little too much rent where we are, and I rather like the arrangement of the rooms here."

The following day we viewed the vacant apartment but found, when we telephoned the agent, that it had already been rented. However, as our own rooms suited us fairly well, we were not greatly disappointed.

We had just finished dinner that same evening when Halesowen paid us an unexpected visit. He came striding into the apartment, and without preamble plunged into a surprising tale of uncanny happenings at his place.

"Take it slowly," pleaded Lesty, frowning. "You say it was a short while after we left?"

"About an hour after," replied Halesowen nervously. I had brought out the potsherd, and set it down in its wooden stand on the table before me. I was copying the hieroglyphics, and had only my reading light burning. The rest of the room was in shadow."

He paused an instant, then went on quickly. "I was sitting with my back to the windows facing the door. No one could possibly have entered the room unseen by me—no one. I was bending down to scrutinize a badly-defaced character when I felt a queer sensation stealing over me. It was as though someone were standing close behind my chair watching me."

"That's a very common sensation," explained Lesty. "Nervous strain alone can cause it."

"Yes, I know. But not what followed. The sensation became so pronounced that I stood up. No one was in the room. I determined to go for a walk on the Common, telling myself that the fresh air would quickly clear the uncanny cobwebs out of my brain. Accordingly I extinguished the bulb and went out. I was just putting my cap on when something prompted me to return, and lock up the potsherd."

He fixed his eyes upon us with an expression of doubt.

"There was someone or something in the room with me!"

"What do you mean?" asked Lesty incredulously.

"I quite distinctly saw a hand and a bare white arm pass away from the table—and *vanish!* It was dark in the room, remember. But despite the shadows, I could see the arm well enough." At the recollection a look of horror came into Halesowen's eyes. "I immediately switched on the reading light, but there was nothing to be seen. There was no one but myself in the apartment, for I searched it thoroughly."

A moment of silence followed this remarkable story. I sat intently watching Lesty, who, in turn, was regarding Halesowen with the stolid, vacant stare which sometimes served to conceal the working of his keen mind.

"It's a great pity you didn't let us know sooner," he said, rising slowly to his feet. "This is interesting."

II

Halesowen's nerves evidently had been badly shaken by the inexplicable incident. As the three of us strode across the southeast corner of the Common he informed us that the new tenant of the adjoining flat had moved in.

"I've been away all day," he said. "But his belongings were bundled in some time during the afternoon."

We proceeded upstairs and into the cozy room which had been the scene of the unusual occurrence. As it was growing dark, Halesowen turned on the light, and pointed out the chair by the writing-table in which he had been sitting.

"Did you have the windows open?" asked Lesty.

"Yes," he replied. "I left the chairs and the awning out, too, as it was a fine night. In fact, you can see that they still remain practically as you left them when you were here last."

"When you returned and saw the hand and arm, you would have had to pass around to this side of the table in order to reach the lamp?" Lesty asked.

"Yes."

Apparently Lesty was about to make some observation when he was interrupted by the ringing of the doorbell.

"Who do you suppose that can be?" muttered Halesowen. "I saw no one go in below!"

As Halesowen passed through the lighted room and into the hall we leaned forward in our chairs, wondering who could be calling at so late an hour. We were not kept long in suspense. There was a shuffling of footsteps and an odd mumbling voice with a queer accent said:

"Good evening, Mr. Halesowen. When I discovered that we were neighbors I could not resist this opportunity to call and re-

new a most pleasant acquaintance!"

"Dr. Zeda!" we heard Halesowen exclaim, with scant cordiality.

I glanced at Lesty, and we rose together and stepped through the open window in time to see a truly remarkable individual enter. He was a large-framed man, with snow-white hair trimmed close to his skull, in almost crew-cut fashion. His high, very wrinkled brow gleamed in the reading light radiance, and perched above the bridge of his nose was a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez which contrasted oddly with his charcoal-gray tight-fitting clothes, which were almost Edwardian enough to be once again in style.

His eyes were dark and piercing, but when he smiled they crinkled into little folds, and their sharpness ceased to seem disturbing.

Halesowen rapidly muttered the usual formalities, and for fifteen minutes Dr. Zeda waxed effusive.

Allowing for his effusiveness, there was nothing one could take exception to in his behavior. I was rather startled by the brusk responses of our usually polite host.

When, finally, he rose to take his departure, he extended an invitation to us to dine with him on the following day.

"My place is in disgraceful disorder," he said, "but I am sure you will make allowances for the fact that moving is in itself a major ordeal."

Though I half expected Halesowen to decline, he surprised me by accepting for all three of us.

Whereupon Dr. Zeda departed.

Halesowen returned into the room, lighted a cigarette, regarded it for a moment meditatively and then exclaimed angrily and with forceful conviction, "He's been watching me and when he saw that the next apartment was vacant he naturally jumped at the chance of renting it."

"It's hard to believe," I said, "that he'd be prepared to take and furnish an apartment for the sole purpose of keeping an eye on your potsherd."

"You've no idea how anxious he is," Halesowen assured me. "If you could have seen his face in Cairo when I flatly refused to accept his offer you would be better able to understand."

"Why don't you let him have the potsherd then—if he's willing to pay you a good price?"

"I'll be damned if I will!" said Halesowen stubbornly.

On the following day we lunched with Dr. Zeda, and were surprised at the orderly state of his new lodgings. Everything, from floor to ceiling, was in its proper place.

"It hasn't taken you long to get things straightened out," commented Lesty."

"No," replied the other. "These big firms will do it all in a day if you insist—and that's precisely what I did."

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit, for he proved an amiable and most considerate host, and I think even Lesty grew less suspicious of him. During the weeks that followed he came several times to our rooms, and we frequently met at Halesowen's. The latter, who had perhaps injudiciously submitted photographs and drawings of the potsherd to the British Museum, experienced no repetition of the mysterious phenomenon which had so disastrously unnerved him.

Then, about seven o'clock one morning when the mists hung low over the Common and there was a depressing sultriness in the air, a boy came for Lesty and myself with news of a startling new development. He was a highly intelligent lad who did odd jobs for Halesowen, and he brought word of an attempted burglary, together with a request that we should join his employer without delay.

It goes without saying that our curiosity was keenly aroused. We were soon with our friend, and found him seated in the familiar room before a large cabinet with double glass doors. It was clearly evident that the cabinet had been ransacked hastily. Other cases in which he kept various curios had also been opened, and the place was in general disorder.

"What's gone?" asked Lesty in instant, sympathetic concern.

"Nothing!" Halesowen replied. "The potsherd is in the safe, and the safe is in my bedroom. The thief was apparently interested in nothing else."

"You lock it up at night then. I thought you kept it in the cabinet?"

"Only during the day," Halesowen said. "At night it goes into the safe, along with several less valuable trifles. But only one other person beside myself would know that."

We looked at Halesowen in silence. But the name of the most logical suspect remained unspoken, for at that moment a frantic ringing of the doorbell was followed by a loud, insistent knocking.

Halesowen went quickly into the hall, and returned almost as quickly with a greatly agitated Dr. Zeda hovering behind him. "My apartment has been burglarized," Zeda exclaimed. "The thief has ransacked my entire collection!"

Lesty coughed loudly. But when I turned my head to look at him his face was quite expressionless. Halesowen seemed stricken dumb by surprise. For my own part, as I watched Dr. Zeda staring about the disordered room and noted the growing look of bewilderment which was

creeping over his face I was compelled to admit to myself that he was either a consummate actor or that we had done him a grave injustice.

"Halesowen!" he exclaimed in bewildered agitation, his lips trembling. "Your apartment has apparently been ransacked as thoroughly as my own. Nothing has been overlooked—"

Halesowen nodded. "The burglar gave me a call, too," he said grimly.

"Good Lord!" gasped Zeda, seizing the other's arm, "tell me quickly. Have you lost anything of value?"

Halesowen glanced at him suspiciously. "No," he answered.

"I am glad!" exclaimed the doctor. "I feared— But perhaps you're wondering what the thief was after?"

"I can guess," Halesowen said.

"You need no longer guess. I will tell you. He was searching for your fragment of the sacred vase, just as he was for mine!"

We were even more astonished by this assertion than we had been by Zeda's bewildered agitation.

"*Your* fragment?" said Halesowen slowly, with his eyes riveted on Zeda's face. "Precisely what fragment are you talking about?"

"The one I found—the one which, together with your potsherd, makes up the complete vase!" Zeda paused, then added with quiet persuasiveness. "I can see that you are unconvinced. If you will wait a moment I will show it to you."

He turned and left the room. His gait had a mincing awkwardness, quite indescribable, and as we listened to his retreating footsteps passing quickly downstairs we could only gape at one another in consternation.

"His confounded ingenuity," exclaimed Halesowen, "has completely tied my hands!"

Zeda was gone for fifteen or twenty minutes. When he returned he carried a small iron box which he placed carefully upon the table and as carefully unlocked. Within it a second box of polished ebony snuggly fitted to an inner lining of untarnished bronze, and when this was unlocked in turn, it proved to contain, reposing in a nest of blue velvet, a fragment of antique pottery.

Taking the fragment in his hand, the doctor turned to Halesowen and requested him to produce the potsherd.

Halesowen, after a momentary hesitation, went into his bedroom and returned almost immediately with the broken vase in its wooden frame. Dr. Zeda, placing the portion which he held in his hand against the one in the frame, but not so closely as to bring the parts into actual contact, turned to us with a triumphant smile.

"As you can see, gentlemen, they correspond to a smallest fraction! And now," said Zeda, evilently gratified by a surprise which we could not conceal, "I will tell you a story which you may believe or discredit, just as you choose. I only wish to emphasize that I have given up my life to such studies, and that I am willing, as matters stand, to have you join me in helping to solve the mystery of the potsherd of Anubis."

III

"The date is no matter," said Dr. Zeda, "but there is at Gizeh, to the north of the Sphinx, a temple dedicated to Isis. Here the gods of the dead were adored—but the worship of Anubis took precedence, and was conducted at a shrine apart. At the Anubis shrine, locked within thirty-three doors, each guarded by its separate custodian who alone held the key, reposed a sacred symbol. It was a symbol, my friends, upon which was based the occult knowledge of the initiated, a symbol more precious than the afterlife of a Pharaoh in the eyes of his subjects and so the inscription explicitly stated."

"I have never met with the inscription," said Halesowen dryly.

Dr. Zeda smiled. "You never are likely to meet it," he replied. "Modern Egyptologists are mere unseeing vandals blinded to the secret that Egypt conceals behind the eroded facade of her great, motionless gods, her far-flung empire of the dead."

Dr. Zeda looked about him with a defiant challenge in his glance. Then he quietly resumed his story.

"At the change of the moon in the sacred month, Methori, a maiden selected from a noble house for her beauty and purity, held in her hands the precious receptacle—held it aloft so that the initiated might worship it until the first white beam rested upon it. Then all bowed down their heads and chanted the 'Hymn of the Passing Souls.'

"After that it was locked again within the thirty-three doors, there to remain for another year. No one saw the symbol itself but the high priest, who looked upon it during the Methori period. Anyone else who gazed upon it died instantly, in agonizing torment. It was contained in a vase of rare and exquisite workmanship."

He paused impressively, and so earnest was his expression that for a moment I could almost believe him to have witnessed the strange rites that he told of with such conviction.

"In a year so long ago," he resumed, "that any attempt to give it a date in pre-dynastic chronology or otherwise would be worse than futile, the high-born virgin on whom the exalted office had

been conferred called down upon her head the curse of the high priest and the anger of the most high gods. She was even rejected by Set himself! She let fall from her hands the sacred vase, and the holy symbol was lost to the children of earth forever. And lost with it was the key to the Book of Wisdom. The tragedy was without precedent."

"Go on!" said Halesowen impatiently, for Zeda had paused again.

"I thought you might have guessed," said the doctor. "The judgment was 'Until the parts of the vase are made whole again.' "

He looked steadily at Halesowen. "There were five fragments. A large one, which is your potsherd, and four smaller ones which, after twenty years of untiring search, I have recovered and joined together. My purpose now is to make whole again that which was broken.

"I intend by a cautious exercise of the lost wisdom to summon before me the Egyptian girl's wandering spirit before it returns again to plead for rest at the judgment seat of Amenti."

He paused, then went on quickly. "I am going to ask you to help me. You are skeptical, naturally. But I think I shall be able to convince you. We shall hold—a seance. Tonight in your apartment, if that will be agreeable to you."

We looked at each other interrogatively. When at last Halesowen spoke I was sure that I could detect in his voice both hostility and a subtly veiled irony.

"All right. It's a wild, mystical departure from orthodox scholarship, but you've managed to convince yourself, apparently. We'll go along with you."

The doctor expressed himself as satisfied. He was carefully relocking the fragment of the vase in its double case and was about to depart when a question occurred to me.

"Just whom do you suspect of the attempted burglary?" I asked.

He turned in the door, and regarded me intently. "There are others," he replied. "They do not wish us to succeed and would not scruple to resort to violence."

With that Dr. Zeda took his departure.

Little of interest occurred during the day until about three o'clock in the afternoon, when Halesowen aroused me from an after-dinner nap to show me a letter which he had just received from the British Museum. It was in reply to an earlier communication inquiring about the photographs and drawings which he had submitted, and it bore the surprising information that no such photographs and drawings had been received.

We usually took tea in the afternoon, and on this occasion Halesowen joined us. About five o'clock Dr. Zeda also looked in.

He remained until it began to grow dark, when we all went to Halesowen's to arrange the first "sitting," as Zeda called the projected seance. Retiring for a few minutes to his own establishment, Zeda returned with the iron box and explained what he proposed to do.

"We'll sit around this small table exactly as we would in an ordinary seance," he said. "But there will be no medium—only the potsherd. With these flexible bands I will temporarily attach the parts and stand the vase in Mr. Halesown's frame, here by the window. Beside it we will place the lamp—shaded thus—so that a dim light falls upon it. We can just see from where we sit in the dark. We will not wait until it is completely dark outside."

Between eight and nine o'clock he expressed himself satisfied with the light—or, rather, lack of it—and we all gathered around the table in the gloom, spreading our hands as he directed.

For close upon an hour we sat in tense silence, the room seeming to be very hot. A slight breeze off the Common had wafted the fumes of Zeda's cigar in through the open windows, which he had afterward closed, and the reek was highly unpleasant.

I was growing very weary of the entire business. Lesty, despite the doctor's warning against disturbing the silence, had begun to cough and fidget irritably, and Halesowen was also becoming impatient when Zeda startled us by unexpectedly announcing: "We shall accomplish nothing tonight. Turn up the lights."

From the celerity with which Halesowen complied, I was convinced that his nerves too had been strained to the breaking point.

"Something is not propitious," said Zeda, relocking his portion of the vase in its case. "Tomorrow we shall make some changes in the general arrangements."

He seemed not at all disappointed, being apparently as confident as ever in the ultimate success of the seances. One of the windows, he suggested, should be left open on the following evening during the sitting. Several other points he also mentioned as being conceivably responsible for our initial failure—such as our positions around the table and the relative distance of the potsherd.

"We shall see tomorrow," were his last words as he left us.

"A perfect monument of mendacity!" muttered Lesty, as we listened to his retiring footsteps on the gravel far below. "I'm inclined to suspect that even his accent is assumed. I don't know why we even seem to credit such an incredible fable."

"I don't know, either," said Halesowen reflectively. "But he certainly possesses the missing part of the vase. If he does not

believe the story himself what earthly object can he hope to serve by these seances?"

"I give it up!" replied Lesty promptly, and that, I think, rather aptly expressed our respective attitudes in the matter.

The following evening found us grouped once more about the table. It was perhaps a quarter to ten before Zeda had matters arranged to his satisfaction.

Halesowen was a dim silhouette against the patch of light cast by the oil-reading-lamp beside the vase, which stood the length of the room away, and I was conscious of a suppressed excitement, which I am sure was shared by my companions.

I heard a distant clock striking the half-hour and then the three-quarters, but still nothing had occurred. A motorcar drove around from the road and stopped somewhere at the outer end of the drive and I found myself wondering idly if it were that of the surgeon who lived at No. 10.

After that everything was very quiet, and I was expecting to hear the hour strike and straining my ears to catch the sound of the first chime, when the rocking and creaking of the table began.

Instantly Zeda's warning tones came softly: "Whatever happens, do not remove your hands from the table!"

He ceased speaking, and the rocking motions, together with the rapping and creaking that had sounded from all about us, also ceased with disconcerting suddenness. A silence fell, so short in duration as to be scarcely appreciable—a silence the more unnerving because it was almost instantly broken by an unexpected sound.

It was a woman's voice, very low and clear, and it seemed to mutter something in a weird, rising cadence with a high note at the end of every third or fourth syllable. Over and over again—an eerie, sonorous intonation vaguely like a Gregorian chant.

"Triumph!" whispered Zeda. "It's 'The Hymn of the Passing Souls.' "

His words seemed to disturb the singer, but only for a moment. The hymn was continued.

This singular performance was proving too much for my nerves. At each recurrence of the quiet, clear note on the fourth beat of the third bar a cold shudder ran down my spine. Then, as the very monotony of the thing was beginning to grow appalling, I suddenly became aware of a slim, white figure standing beside the vase.

The chant stopped, and I could hear nothing but the nervous breathing of my companions. Seated as they were I doubted whether Halesowen or Lesty could see this apparition. But I was facing directly toward it and could see that it was a woman.

I could see every line of her

figure—the curves of her throat and arms and shoulders, and the dull metallic gleaming of her clustering hair. As she extended her hand toward the light I distinctly saw a large, green stone set in a ring on her index finger.

She must be very beautiful, I thought, and was peering through the gloom in a vain endeavor to see her more closely when there came a disconcerting crash, followed almost instantly by utter darkness!

The table was overturned and I was hurled with a sudden terrible violence to the floor.

IV

A few moments later we stood in a brightly lighted apartment in the absence of Dr. Zeda, staring at one another in dismayed silence.

"He's gone, and the potsherd with him," said Lesty. "He must have passed off your balcony on to his, through the French window."

I had never before realized how easy it was to get from one balcony to another, until I saw Lesty swing himself across.

Halesowen and I followed instantly and we all blundered into Zeda's pitch black apartment through the open window and made for the electric switch beside the mantelpiece, and turned on the light. The room was unfurnished!

"Good Lord!" breathed Halesowen, hurrying into the next.

That too, was quite bare, as was every room in the apartment. The outer door was locked.

"Obviously he had every scrap of stuff removed!" I said. "He probbaly rented the stuff from a big furnishing firm—curios and all. I remember noticing that his curiosities were of a very ordinary character, considering his extensive travels and the nature of his studies."

"No doubt whatever," agreed Lesty. "His burglary proved a failure—and, I think, must have been interrupted—though I am compelled to admire the neat manner in which he handled the very delicate situation that resulted. His more recent elaborate device worked to perfection—from Zeda's point of view!"

Lesty nodded, and went on. "He probably had a car waiting at the corner. I heard it come up. When the reading light was capsized, and his 'Egyptian girl' had crept from his balcony to yours, and returned the same way with the vase, he overturned the table and pushed you two chaps backwards in your chairs.

"Then, before I could reach him, he bolted out and locked the door after him. For, having lulled my suspicions by a practically uneventful seance, he cunningly placed himself nearest to the door and me farthest away. His accomplice had run straight through

Zeda's flat and out to the waiting car, and there he joined her. They may be thirty miles away by now!"

Being unable to open the door, we had perforce to return to Halesowen's balcony by the same way that we had come, our friend bewailing his lost potsherd and exclaiming: "The devilshly cunning scamp!"

"I knew he had some deep game in hand," said Lesty, "but I hadn't bargained for this move. Of course, I had noticed his dodge of borrowing all our matches. But I didn't grasp its importance until it was too late."

"A clever rogue!" I agreed. "But wasn't his first attempt—for I suppose we must classify the mysterious arm under that head—more than a trifle indiscreet?"

"No doubt," agreed Lesty. "But we didn't know then that Zeda was in London. The flat was still unfurnished, remember. Also, they may have thought Halesowen was in bed, or the woman—whom he has so cleverly kept out of sight—may have exceeded her instructions in attempting to touch the potsherd while anyone remained in the room."

"But," said Halesowen slowly, "we don't know that there *was* any woman!"

"Eh?" queried Lesty.

"Did you see her?"

"No," he replied quickly.

"I did," I said. "She was very lovely—for a rigged seance impostor."

Lesty stared curiously. "You surprise me," he commented dryly.

"Zeda was a strange man," said Halesowen, "and things occurred as we sat round that table that need a lot of explaining."

"Very ordinary three-and six-a-head phenomena!" Lesty said. "Merely a blind."

"Then what was the reason of his burning desire to secure my potsherd, if not to complete the vase?"

"Do you mean to tell me," asked Lesty, "that you are going to credit that story about the priestess? *Now*, after he has shown his hand? Do you wish to suggest that he was aided by a spirit?"

"Then why was he so keen to get the thing?" persisted Halesowen.

Lesty looked at him, and then at me. Finally he shrugged his shoulders and began to load his pipe. Having done so, he sat smoking and staring at the brilliant moon.

"Well?" inquired our host.

"I give it up!" admitted Lesty.

(CONCLUSION OF MR. CLIFFORD'S ACCOUNT.)

V

One of my visits to the Wapping curio shop of Moris Klaw was made in company with Mr.

Halesowen who, with the others mentioned in the foregoing narrative, I subsequently had met.

Somewhere amid the misty gloom of this place sits a large gray parrot that proclaims itself stridently: "Moris Klaw! Moris Klaw! The devil's come for you!"

That signal brings Moris Klaw from his hiding place. He shuffles into the shop, a figure appropriate to his surroundings.

Imagine a tall, stooping man, enveloped in a very faded blue dressing-gown, his skin but half a shade lighter than that of a Chinaman. His hair, his shaggy brows, and scanty beard are of an even more surprising color, a color which eludes description. He wears a golden pince-nez.

When, upon this particular occasion I introduced my companion, and Moris Klaw acknowledged the introduction, I saw Halesowen stare.

"It is very stuffy in the shop today!" Moris Klaw proclaimed. "Isis! Isis! Come and open the windows."

He invoked a godess, and a godess appeared—a brilliantly beautiful brunette with delightfully curved scarlet lips and flashing eyes whose fire the gloom could not vanquish.

"Good God!" cried Halesowen, and fell back.

"My daughter, Isis," rumbled Moris Klaw. "This is Mr. Halesowen, from whom we rescued the Egyptian potsherd."

"What!" Halesowen breathed, leaning forward across the counter.

"You recognize my daughter," said Moris Klaw, "but not Dr. Zeda, eh? Or only his poor, old voice? You gave us considerable trouble, Mr. Halesowen. Once you returned home just as Isis, who had climbed onto your balcony, was about to take the potsherd."

"There was no one in the room!"

"I was in the room!" said the girl coolly. "I was draped in black from head to foot. I slipped behind the window hangings unseen, while you fumbled with your light!"

"It was indiscreet," said Moris Klaw, "and made it harder for me, because afterward you locked up the treasure and I had to resort to a more elaborate strategy. But, remember, I offered to buy it!"

"Suppose," said Halesowen slowly, "I have you both arrested?"

"You cannot," was the placid reply, "for you cannot say how you came into possession of the sherd. Professor Sheraton was in the cleft of a similar forked stick —and that is where *I* came in!"

"What! you were acting for him?"

"Certainly. I happened to be in Egypt at the time, and he was a friend of mine. Your thief, Ali, left a small piece of the potsherd

behind, and I was entrusted to make it complete."

"You have succeeded," said Halesowen grimly, all the time furtively watching the beautiful Isis.

"Yes," rumbled Moris Klaw. "I think we can agree on that."

In conclusion you may ask if the value of the potsherd justified the elaborate and costly mode of its recovery. My reply must be: Upon what does the present fame of Professor Sheraton rest? His *"New Key to the Egyptian Book of the Dead,"* surely. And upon what is that work founded? Upon the hieroglyphics of the Potsherd of Anubis which—no questions being asked of so distinguished a savant—was recently acquired from the professor by the British Nation at a cost of fifteen thousand pounds.

A strange wild song from under tons and tons of earth chills a little girl with no brothers and sisters in the eeriest of crime shockers

THE SCREAMING WOMAN

By RAY BRADBURY

With a sleuthing ingenuity deservedly famous the one and only Bulldog Drummond scores two of his brighter triumphs in a dark inn murder mystery

BULLDOG DRUMMOND AT LONELY INN

By H. C. McNEILE

in the next SAINT

the port of peril

by . . . Van Wyck Mason

A shipment of arms to the wrong party can be as deadly as a *fer-de-lance* gliding along a jungle trail. So Captain North took steps—

"SENOR SANTOS?" The desk clerk's voice was coldly disinterested. "He will come downstairs in a moment."

Captain Hugh North, D.C.I., standing very tall and muscular before the reception desk of the Hotel Mirasol, raised mildly sarcastic brows. "Indeed?"

The clerk's saddle-hued visage contracted. "That *caballero* also inquired for him," he said, indicating with an expressive forefinger an open doorway beyond which a stretch of bar was visible. Neatly framed in this aperture stood an angular, leanly muscular figure in a perfectly fitting tropical worsted suit.

A brief smile flitted over Hugh North's gaunt brown visage as he advanced into the bar where a dozen Cuban gentlemen sipped their *refrescos de piñas* and noisily discussed last night's *jai alai* results.

It was significant that Captain North did not call Bruce Kilgour by name, for that sandy-haired and red-faced gentleman was of his Britannic Majesty's Intelligence Service, and it is not con-

The unique career of Captain Hugh North, D.C.I., has spread such a legendary glow over the scenes of his innumerable triumphs that we've often found ourselves wondering if the Java Straits and the Ports-of-Spain would ever be quite the same if stripped of all Northean guideposts. And now once again Van Wyck Mason has set the stage for the hewing out of a new legend from the frowning granite of a criminal conspiracy of peril all compounded.

Copyright, 1934, by Van Wyck Mason

sidered good form to call such acquaintances by name.

"Hello, old fellow," was all North said as the Englishman's craggy red features lit up momentarily. "What flat stones have you been hiding under?"

The other grinned, nodded and turned to whisper to the busy bartender. Then he gave North a look which indicated that a table set somewhat apart would give them a reasonable assurance of privacy. Instantly the dark-haired American was aware that his premonitions had been correct. Things *were* bad in Havana, if Bruce Kilgour, who had never been one to get unduly alarmed over trifles, found it necessary to speak in whispers and try to conceal a bulge in his right coat pocket which hinted at trouble—in serious proportions.

Very likely Kilgour was involved in the same ominous affair which had brought Hugh North himself from Washington. He hoped so, for experience had shown that the big, sandy-haired British agent was "the shade of a rock in a weary land," when it came to delicate and dangerous situations.

And a sturdy rock it was.

Repressing his misgivings, North dropped into a chair opposite Kilgour who was making a pretense of inspecting the contents of a cocktail glass.

"You weren't surprised to see me?" North asked, crossing his legs and lighting a brown Cuban cigarette.

"Hardly," Kilgour replied, his eyes darting suddenly to North's face. "Things have been getting so deucedly tense down here I was sure someone in Washington would be sending the resourceful Captain Hugh North this way." The Englishman's bright blue eyes lingered in slow, wise humor on the shrewd gray ones of the American who sat tugging gently at his small black mustache.

"Good guess, Major Kilgour," said North. "But you're right. The State Department's plenty worried about the amiable General O'Quinn's projected ruckus in Guatecata."

It was hard, North found, to speak with levity when in his memory still echoed the earnest warnings of his superior. "You've got to locate that infernal arms shipment, North. *You've got to!* You know as well as I do that Juan O'Quinn is a selfish butcher. If he gets those munitions ten or twenty thousand poor devils of peons will die the kind of death you wouldn't wish it on a yellow dog. And the little matter of a pink-tinted banana country near the big ditch is unthinkable, my dear Hugh. *Stop it,* period."

"Down in Havana," Fitz-Ambler had continued, "we've an agent—Esteban Santos—working at the O'Quinn *junta* headquar-

ters. Find him, no matter where he is, and cooperate. It'll be dangerous business, North. You'll be taking your life in your own hands the minute you land. But remember we've *got* to learn where that shipload of munitions is to be landed."

Unseeingly, the Intelligence officer's sombre gaze wandered out into the glaring sunshine of the narrow, crowded street outside the Mirasol's bar. Yes, old Fitz-Ambler had been terribly upset.

If O'Quinn's communist hellions made a shambles of Guatecata, other little banana republics might well be drawn into the turmoil, and that, of course, would lead to international repercussions. State Department officials would start losing sleep over it, and a very explosive issue would be injected into a world situation which was already alarmingly unstable. You never knew how far such small sparsely-populated countries would go, as they had a tradition of violent revolution to start with—the kind that is usually manipulated by pompous little would-be dictators whose sole aim in life was to slavishly follow the red line of hate emanating from Moscow.

A white-coated *mozo* deftly setting down North's cocktail aroused him from his discouraging reflections, and when once the boy had hurried off with long apron slatting about his legs, North hurriedly surveyed the voluble patrons of the bar.

"Von Zastrow again?" he demanded in a low tone. "It's just a guess—but it occurred to most of us in Army Intelligence."

The line of Major Bruce Kilgour's angular jaw contracted. "The scoundrel and his cold-blooded associates are backing O'Quinn to the hilt—and backing him are our friends beyond the Iron Curtain."

North's fingers tightened on his glass-stem. "Even if Von Zastrow is a local industrial big shot and a lot of his satellites hold down government portfolios, the directors of his company ought to be lined up against a wall and shot for the good of society."

Inexplicably, a premonition of disaster invaded North's consciousness and once more his eyes swept the bar and then peered through iron-barred windows into a tiled patio where several macaws, as gorgeous as living flowers, preened themselves in the late afternoon sunlight. Nothing even faintly ominous was to be seen, so he berated himself for an over-imaginative fool. Later, perhaps, there would be danger—plenty of it. But for the moment all was peaceful and gay.

"Nervous, eh?" Kilgour grinned. "Wait till you've been here a while. I've been shot at once. In addition to the political

dynamite, Downing Street's vitally concerned for an even larger variety of reasons. But we may be too late. We got wind of all this only last Friday."

"That's the beauty of being in the Intelligence," North remarked bitterly. "Maybe you've noticed it? What about this Santos hombre? Apparently you've been working with him—even if he is our man."

"Oh, was he?" Kilgour looked amiably blank. "A clever chap, too. He telephoned me in a great stew about an hour ago, thought I might know if an American agent got down in time."

North's straight black brows merged for an instant. "Suppose we go up there then. It's better than being seen together down here, eh?"

Kilgour shrugged a little and smiled mirthlessly. "We may as well. It's really your show, you know. Dear old Monroe Doctrine and all that!"

North, who had had certain turbulent dealings with the myrmidons of Latin American conspiracy, gulped the rest of his drink, got up and flung a forty *centavo* piece ringing among the glasses on the bar. He sighed as they turned to the door. It was nice to be back in Havana again, a city which appealed to his cosmopolitan tastes more than any other in the Western Hemisphere.

Bruce Kilgour apparently was familiar with the number of Senor Santos' room, for without hesitation he crossed the palm-shaded patio and continued on across its handsome old red tiles to a stair leading upwards on the exterior of the building.

They had just set foot to a flight of worn stone steps when North suddenly flattened himself against the wall. A ponderous red tile hurtled by, barely missing his head, and shattered itself on the patio pavement with such violence that the macaws shrieked in frenzied alarm.

"No harm done," North said in an emotionless monotone, his face becoming even gaunter than usual, as he scanned the triple row of windows just above.

Kilgour removed a hand from his weighted coat pocket. "The reception committee seems to be a trifle over-anxious," he said.

North smiled grimly, and murmured in a consoling tone. "They're energetic lads, Bruce —always on the job. Von Zastrow picks them that way."

Once they were inside the Hotel Mirasol's north wing, Kilgour led the way up a flight of stairs to a high-ceilinged corridor, pausing again for a brief instant to pat the heavy object in his coat pocket. Then he moved forward until he was standing directly before the door panels of Room 37.

As North silently moved up beside him Kilgour tapped once

lightly. "Santos!" he cautiously called. "This is Kilgour. I say, Santos, I must see you at once."

From inside the room there came an indistinct scraping noise. North's hand shot out, seized the small brass knob and flung the door violently open.

"Santos? My God!" The Englishman brushed by North's tensed figure and rushed to a plump, white-clad form lying stretched out on the floor beside a mosquito-curtained bed. A sticky scarlet stream was making a sponge of the fallen man's shirt front. Vaguely, North was aware that hundreds of flies had made the buzzing sound which had puzzled him.

Hugh North, familiar with the ways of Von Zastrow's hirelings, forced himself to ignore the gravely wounded man and from a shoulder holster produced a compact .32 automatic. With the musty, sickish-sweet odor of fresh blood strong in his nostrils, he quickly examined a small wooden wardrobe, peered into the hallway again and then cautiously approached the iron-barred window.

It was only when a most ordinary vista of smoking chimney-pots, red roofs and radio aerials met his eye that he turned to join Kilgour as he worked over the mahogany-featured little man. The Cuban had been stabbed in the left side and, with a sinking heart, North realized that Esteban Santos' last report had found its way into the files of U. S. Army Intelligence.

"He's trying to talk, but he can't," Kilgour whispered. "It's a wretched shame. Everything was going rather well."

"Maybe he can nod," North said and bent low. "Did you find out about the shipment?"

Esteban Santos' head inclined ever so slightly, but then his eyes sagged shut—so weakly that North feared he was gone. "Let's give him some water," he suggested.

On crossing to the washstand Captain North made an interesting discovery. The bowl was half full of slightly tinted water and, though two great drops of blue-black ink were on the rim of the basin, the fountain pen or ink bottle which should have produced the spots was nowhere to be seen. Moreover there was a small bluish smear which indicated that a pen had been hurriedly picked up.

"It's damned queer!" North said. "You'd think if Santos was going to wash his pen he'd have done it in running water."

Though the anxious American forced water between Santos' ashen lips, it had no reviving effect, and North was about to test the man's pulse to see if there was any earthly use in calling a doctor when he noticed three red hairs clutched between the tightly contracted fingers of the dying

agent. Tight-lipped, he carefully extracted them and slipped them into an envelope while Kilgour snatched a pillow from the bed, and thrust it beneath Santos' head and shoulders

It was then that the grimly apprehensive Intelligence officers came upon the third clue—a cloth tobacco pouch which, hideously spotted with blood, had been hidden beneath the Cuban's rotund form.

The noise of light, hurrying footfalls on the tiles of the corridor gave North no time to examine the most promising of the clues. He hurriedly swathed it in a handkerchief and slid it into a side pocket of his white linen coat. Then he stepped quietly behind the door while Kilgour took up his post behind the big wardrobe.

A faint knock sounded, and then the door of the room swung inwards to reveal, poised on the threshold, one of the prettiest girls Hugh North had ever seen. Sable-haired, but otherwise as vivid and colorful as a jungle blossom, the surprising intruder wore a fine black-lace mantilla which, with her rather full skirt of lemon tinted organdie, gave her a fragile, old-fashioned air, sharply incongruous in so brutal a setting.

Captain North, acutely conscious of General Fitz-Ambler's dismal forebodings, saw an instant significance in the way her expression changed from swift horror to fear. She was still standing on the threshold when she saw North's rangy figure hovering beside the door, and uttered a frantic scream.

"Quiet!" North's command flicked out like a whip.

"Ah Dios!" The girl shrank back, her big eyes becoming simply enormous as she faltered in Spanish, "What have you done to my poor Esteban?"

Impulsively she turned again and in a single, lithe motion flung herself on her knees beside the prostrate Cuban. Red and yellow—Spanish colors indeed, North reflected, even though he was witnessing Esteban Santos' frantic efforts to speak.

The stricken agent actually succeeded in raising himself from the pillow, but though his lips moved, no sound came forth as he peered steadfastly up into the lovely pale face above him. In despair his eyes wavered over to Captain North. But even as Hugh North bent low, there came a final rush of blood and Senor Esteban Santos' body crumpled into the incredible flatness of the newly dead.

At Santos' death the girl moaned, stiffened and then glared up with terrible malevolence at the two silent men standing above her.

"God's eternal curse on you, Gringo butchers! *Ay de mi!* My poor boy! My poor Esteban!"

"You've made a very natural mistake, Senorita," Kilgour gently informed her. "We are the last people who'd want to kill your friend."

"Don't try to lie to me!" she cried.

The girl in yellow suddenly sprang to her feet. A quick swirl of her full skirt revealed a blue garter. Barely in time North flung himself upon her and wrenched from her hand one of those nickel-plated, pearl-handled affairs that look like toys but which kill so excellently. Before the ferocity of her attack, Kilgour's bony face went a little pale.

"Control yourself," North snapped in staccato Spanish. "We are your friends."

"You killed him! You killed him!" The girl in the yellow dress struggled until Hugh North was holding her tightly pinioned.

"Be quiet, foolish one!" he panted, feeling more than a little ridiculous.

With mercurial swiftness the girl's fury vanished and the room became so still that North could hear clearly the music of a distant band playing the newest dance tune.

"I am most sorry, Senores." The disheveled girl blinked rapidly two or three times. "I—I must have gone a little mad."

North released her, but kept her little pistol. "Your name, please?" he asked.

"Manuela de Macéo y Penalver."

"You are not a Cuban—are you?"

The girl stared at him, a little frightened it seemed. "How did you know I was Spanish?"

The smile flashing beneath Captain Hugh North's close-clipped black mustache was an anodyne to suspicion as he said, "I have traveled in Andalusia. But tell me, was Senor Santos your fiancé?"

A curious personality, this girl—well dressed but missing real chicness by a narrow margin. With interest the tall American noted how her smooth cheeks and soft lips, eloquent of passion, had been tinted with almost professional skill. But for all that, he reminded himself, smart and wholly reputable women of the Continent were adept at such arts.

"*Si.* My fiancé," cried Manuela de Macéo, her jet eyes abruptly luminous. "Ah, how I loved him! Every night Esteban would come to the cafe and now—"

"The cafe?" Kilgour softly suggested the question as, with a white canvas shoe, he drove away some flies which had settled to explore the ghastly pool on the tiles.

"*Si,*" she murmured and swept both men with a look of embarrassment. "Just now I dance at

el Tritón—a disgusting little cabaret." Her gracefully rounded shoulders rose in an inimitably Latin shrug. "But one must live, and in these times—" The girl's eyes, very round and troubled, sought North's. "You are of the police, Senores?"

"Not exactly—but we have authority to investigate this sad affair," North said. Smoothly, the Intelligence officer tried to win her confidence and turn it to immediate advantage. "You know most of Senor Santos' friends?"

The girl in yellow organdie nodded vigorously. "But yes."

"You don't want to be dragged in on this affair, do you, Senorita?"

She cast him a timid smile. "I really loved Esteban. If it would help you I will run any risk, any disgrace."

"It would help us if you stay out of the case," North said. "Where can you be found?"

Curious lights gleamed momentarily at the back of the girl's eyes. Then, with characteristic quickness, she crossed to a little writing desk, caught up a sheet of blank paper and tore a thin strip from its lefthand corner. Next from a little gold-mesh bag she produced a slim automatic pencil, and wrote out an address which she handed to the American.

"I will take this," she said, catching up the remainder of the sheet. "If I learn anything I will send you a note at once. Where shall I send it?"

"To the Central Police Station—under the name of Herbert Nevins," North said quickly.

"Good." Earnestly, Manuela de Macéo peered into the American's friendly bronzed features. "Remember! I will do anything—anything! Call on me, I beg of you. Only in revenge will I find a little peace."

In a graceful, bird-like motion the amazing girl bent, kissed North's sinewy brown hand and was gone in an instant.

"You always were a lady-killer," grinned Kilgour. "Wavy black hair, touch of gray at the temples, and all that."

The flushed American continued to inspect a faint circle of lipstick on his palm. "*She* nearly was a British intelligence agent killer."

The Englishman sobered instantly. "Yes, hasn't little Manuela a nasty way of jumping at conclusions?"

Grim realities bore in on North's consciousness. He had already lost a great deal of time and, save for three doubtful clues, he was facing defeat.

For all that, he remained acutely conscious of the peculiar voice of this wickedly gay city, conscious of the gaudy beauty of poinciana blossoms flaming perhaps prophetically red beyond the window bars. If only he were

free to wander down those dim, age-old streets flinging hard-earned dollars away at baccarat and banco, and sampling the delights of a daiquiri made by Mario at the Inglaterra.

Firmly he forced himself to concentrate on the realities of the moment.

"Judging by the conditions of Santos' inner coat pocket," North said, "somebody did a good job of searching. By now that infernal shipment will be somewhere in the Florida Straits, probably cruising right past some of our destroyers."

"What do you think we had better do?" Kilgour demanded when a hasty but expert search of the room revealed nothing of further significance.

"We'll look up Colonel Munoz of the Secret Police office. When I was here last, he was putting a local crimp into some of the shrewdest undercover operations."

"Oh, headquarters methods applied to the tobacco pouch, eh?"

"Yes, and to those hairs. We ought to learn something from them."

"I hope so." Kilgour frowned. "But what you can find out from three hairs and a tobacco pouch won't checkmate the gentle machinations of a Von Zastrow deviously backed by foreign sources."

"Maybe not—" admitted the dark-haired American as they closed the door of Room 37 and set off to give the alarm. "Still, that pouch has possibilities since there was no pipe on Santos—and most Cubans don't smoke pipes."

The sun was plunging into the Caribbean amid a furious crimson glory, and distracted telegrams, incomprehensible to all save Captain North, continued to arrive at the Secret Police Bureau which, lodged in an ancient structure dating from the days of the Captain-Generals, frowned upon the raucous traffic of Havana's early night life.

With the strong delicacy of a great surgeon, North's long fingers manipulated an illuminated slide beneath the lenses of the powerful microscope over which he and Colonel Munoz had labored since four o'clock that afternoon.

North glanced up as Kilgour entered, his high red forehead creased with an anxious frown. He, too, had been decoding impatient cablegrams from Downing Street, and was in a highly nervous state.

"Three years I spend in the Vienna laboratories of Professor Hans Gross," Munoz exclaimed, his teeth whitely agleam in his dark, aquiline visage, "but never have I seen a more scientific criminologist than our friend, *el Captain* Nort'."

"We wouldn't have got any-

where without your help on the analysis," came North's characteristic objection. "Well, Colonel, there doesn't seem to be any doubt about that hair now. It's a man's hair and you were quite right about its having been cut not long ago. I find no perceptible fraying at the terminals.

"That tobacco pouch," he continued, turning toward Kilgour, "was most interesting, Bruce. Colonel Munoz and I have agreed about the main data. The man who probably killed Esteban Santos was a red-haired steamship officer of the engine room staff—taller than average, and probably Russian."

The British agent blinked incredulously, then cleared his throat. "Oh, I see. You've got a new lead?"

Captain North arose and stretched hugely. "When will you English ever admit there's good in any system but your own? No. We've had nothing but what the microscope told us."

"But all this rot about a steamship engineer?"

North pulled out and lit a stumpy Dunhill pipe. "Rot? Not at all. The minute particles of salt we found in the pouch's cloth covering didn't leave much room for doubt. Eh, Colonel?"

Colonel Munoz nodded gravely. "That is so," he confirmed. "There was much mineral oil and grease also. He must have been frequently in the engine room, and was probably an officer because the cloth is of an expensive sort. The tobacco was not of a Cuban variety. So we consulted certain authorities and learned it is of a type very popular in the Urals."

"We of course checked with the port authority," North continued, "but some twenty ships of all tonnages cleared today. As our suspect, despite the Russian tobacco, is not necessarily on a Russian ship, the Colonel has sent detectives to the harbor. Every ship applying for clearance tomorrow will be searched. If our ship has already cleared it's—" a shadow darkened North's bronzed features—"well, it's just too bad unless something new turns up. You know, Bruce, how likely that is."

"It's a rotten shame we found Santos so late," Kilgour said grimly. "Those munitions can be landed in Guatecata inside of twenty-four hours."

North heaved a long sigh—he was weary and U. S. Army Intelligence wasn't being even half way reasonable. No, it was not reassuring to reflect that what happened here in Havana was squarely up to him. No buck passing, no one to share the blame.

Above everything else the enigma of those ink spots harried him. Why *should* Esteban Santos, during the last few minutes of his life, have drawn a

basin full of water and started to pour ink into it—writing fluid which analytical chemistry had revealed to be ordinary fountain pen ink, and not in the least mysterious.

Still stubbornly assailing his problem he crossed to a telephone and, after getting his number, almost at once heard the slightly husky voice of Manuela de Macéo. Did she know a friend of Esteban who had red hair? North's heart felt like a clenched fist as he awaited the reply. Had he heard the girl catch her breath before she answered with vehement earnestness? "There—there is indeed such a one."

"I want to talk to him as soon as possible," North said. "Can you arrange it?" Loud as surf beating on a reef was the surge of blood in the American's ears. Munoz' and Kilgour's faces were taut as though carved from rawhide.

"I—I will send a message to his ship," came the breathless reply. "Unless I phone, he will come to el Tritón for the ten o'clock number."

"You won't fail me?" North fought to keep his voice an emotional blank.

"I have only to remember Esteban," came the bitter retort. "See that *you* do not fail *me!*"

Colonel Munoz, although a busy man, nevertheless made elaborate and regretful excuses before leaving the two Intelligence officers to stare anxiously at the delicate instruments which from the two clues had raised an ephemeral red-haired murderer. Ink? *Ink!* Perhaps marking the difference between victory or defeat for O'Quinn and his remorseless backers.

Suddenly Hugh North's long body stiffened in its rumpled white linen.

"By God, Bruce, I think I've got it! Quick! Where are all the papers from Santos' room?"

"All?" Kilgour stared at the other, and shook his head. "There were only two or three sheets of stationery on the writing desk. The killer made a pretty clean sweep."

With a deeply puzzled Kilgour at his heels, North hurried to the laboratory, filled a basin half full of water and into it dropped half the contents of his fountain pen, stirring it until the mixture turned a dim blue hue.

"We'll test it and make sure," he said and, taking a wooden match stick from a box, proceeded to moisten it in his mouth.

"I say, old man, you haven't gone balmy?"

"Maybe, Bruce—maybe. But did you know that one of the best invisible inks in the world is made in your own mouth?"

While the strident tooting of taxi horns drifted in through the stoutly-barred windows, Captain North, using only the saliva-moistened match stick traced a few

quite undiscernible words on a sheet of paper. Next he dried the paper in an electric oven and then hurried over to the wash basin, the sheet fluttering between his fingers.

"This," he explained, "is to see whether we have the solution too strong or too weak. No use experimenting on an original."

So saying, he carefully dipped the sheet into the solution, slid it back and forth several times, like a photographer developing a film, and then replaced it in the oven to be dried.

"The solution can stand a little more ink," he curtly announced when he inspected the dried sheet. Pale blue, but quite readable, the sentence he had written stood out boldly. *"There will be grave danger at El Tritón."*

"Remarkable," Kilgour exclaimed. "What is the principle?"

"The saliva disturbs minute surface particles of the paper," North explained. "Water will do almost as well. Now we'll test those sheets of paper from Santos' room."

North's rekindled hopes sank to pale embers when all the paper from Santos' room remained barren. For an instant his brows contracted into a single line and over his face came the exasperated look of a man who suddenly recalls that he has left his theater tickets at home. Then, quickly, the expression vanished.

"If the red-haired chap hasn't poor Santos' message on him—do you think Colonel Munoz can get us authority to board the blighter's ship?" Kilgour asked.

"If the engineer hombre shows up we won't have to worry about that," North assured him, pulling on his coat. "And now, Bruce, my boy, I think there's time for us to drop in at el Lobo Romano and see if they're still serving their justly famous *pescado papillot.*"

But the Intelligence officers were destined not to dine at that famed restaurant for, scarcely two blocks from Police Headquarters, a decrepit looking lottery ticket vendor abruptly produced a heavy automatic and sent two bullets crashing into the small of Hugh North's back.

Had that cautious individual not waged war with assassins in disguise before, the unique career of Hugh North, D.C.I. would have ended. As it was he lost his hat and staggered sharply—as a man must under the impact of high-powered bullets, even when they are shattering themselves on a very modern and nearly invisible bullet-proof vest.

While North, deafened and partially dazed, rocked on his heels an excited policeman ran up and, despite Kilgour's frantic protests, shot the struggling vendor dead in his tracks, thus definitely eliminating a valuable source of information.

It was a rather shaken Hugh North who with his companion finally strode down the malodorous Calle Padre Varila and shortly turned into a noisome alley so narrow that by raising his arms Bruce Kilgour could have touched both walls. Here slatterns inhabiting squalid rooms raucously exchanged gossip, and stark naked children quarreled with mangy mongrels over scraps of food. Human derelicts of all sorts shambled by, their predatory eyes alert.

"Certainly raise some four-cornered stinks around here," grunted North.

"Rather," Kilgour replied. "But why the devil wouldn't you let Munoz send along a couple of his secret police?"

"Too risky," North told him. "We've got to take a look at Manuela's red-headed friend. He doesn't know us, but he might recognize a Cuban fly cop and not show up. You see?"

"That's all I want to know," Kilgour grinned and hummed a few bars of a haunting dance tune.

Grimy, smoky and redolent of many generations of unwashed patrons, the Cafe el Tritón was neither large nor small. But perhaps because of its outrageous tawdriness it somehow fascinated the dark-haired American.

As they entered, a pimply mulatto musician with bright, weasel-like eyes experimentally swung his gourds filled with seeds and made them hiss like a thousand snakes. Another musician, darker than his fellows, began to rub a hand drum with enormous pink thumbs.

North was amused to see how promptly the British agent noted the various exits, how firmly he insisted upon a table located in a corner and also conveniently near to a side door. Kilgour's caution was justified for the polyglot clientele crowding around a bar which occupied one whole side of the room was chiefly composed of semi-drunken marine officers, pimps, cadets, as well as several pleasant-mannered gentlemen who would, for a mere twenty *pesos,* dispatch to his eternal reward anyone a man might mention. Needless to say there were also present swarms of shrill-voiced *demi-mondaines* of every age and condition—French, American, German and Spanish.

The leader of the orchestra made a clicking noise with his *claves*—musical instruments rather resembling an end man's bones—and struck up a chant in which, originating on the African river Oldan, has flowed westward through the centuries to become a dance irresistibly rhythmic and sensual.

With every perception keyed to its highest efficiency, North studied the shifting panorama. Manuela de Macéo was at his

table before he quite realized it. So clean and fresh was the Spanish girl's aspect in her vivid green and white shawl that she made all the other women look like green vegetables in a boiled dinner.

"My number comes on next," she murmured hastily. "Mr. Kaufmann will arrive any minute, so be careful. Afterwards I will bring him to your table, and then, Senores, remember Esteban Santos!"

Before North could utter a word of thanks the girl had vanished through a curtain veiling a door to the right.

Presently the gaunt American halted a perspiring waiter and significantly held up a silver *peso*. "I wish to take some flowers to the dressing room of Senorita Macéo after her dance," he said.

Mopping his perspiring forehead on the cuff of a grimy jacket, the waiter raised his voice over the barbaric clatter of the orchestra.

"Pass through that curtained door and turn down the corridor to the right," he advised. "Senorita's dressing room is the second on your left. But, Senor, she never receives gentlemen in there."

"That will be my worry," North grinned and passed over the *peso*.

Ten interminable minutes later Kilgour, sipping unenthusiastically at a wretchedly poor highball, clutched North's wrist and peered intently through the swirling miasma of tobacco smoke.

"See him?" he asked.

The American nodded. His alert gray eyes had already fixed themselves on a not unhandsome and powerfully built individual who negligently stood at the cafe's entrance with the tarnished buttons of his gray serge officer's coat casting back dim reflections.

Captain North's heart became a hard rubber ball that bounded wildly around inside his ribs when, after making an excuse to Kilgour, he arose and, under the pretext of buying a panatela at the bar, walked slowly by the red-haired officer. When he came back there was a curious tautness to his features and excited flashes played at the back of his eyes.

"See him before?" Kilgour muttered.

North shook his head. "No. Big brute, though—arms like a gorilla."

"Russian?"

"Can't tell. But he's not English or American."

A fat little master of ceremonies now appeared and with many elaborate gestures announced that La Macéo, famous the world over, would presently dance the *cumdavle*. Necks were craned, chairs were shifted and

shabby waiters hurried to complete their orders.

"Compared to the *cumdavle,* the rhumba is a minuet," North commented, his eyes still fixed on the square-faced officer across the room. "It ought to be worth watching. And now, Bruce," his voice sank to a whisper, "no arguments. I'm going out. Stay quiet until I come back, or a fight begins. If there's trouble, get out *as fast as you can!* We'll meet at the Bureau."

Kilgour, looked distinctly troubled but knowing Hugh North, nodded just as a thunderous clamor arose from the hand drums. A limelight spluttered off and out onto the dance floor whirled the girl who, that afternoon, had crouched sobbing above Esteban Santos' bloodied corpse.

Manuela's figure was superb in a skin-tight costume of white with an outrageously low-cut bodice. Her long and shapely legs were sheathed in very sheer scarlet stockings which, secured by elaborate white silk and rhinestone garters, ended a good six inches below her frilled dancing tights. Instead of the usual handkerchief, Manuela flaunted a fan made of flaming macaw feathers that matched her stockings.

The effect was electric, and in all the cafe there was not a sound save the whine of the violins, the swish of the gourds, the clatter of the *claves,* and the nerve-quickening rumble of the hand drums. Manuela, all smiles and laughter, writhed into the opening steps of her outrageous dance.

It was only with difficulty that North tore his eyes away and so watched the red-haired officer who was staring at the dancer in rapt fascination. He also saw a remarkable display of primitive emotions written on the loosened lips of the hard-faced men on all sides.

Quicker, more barbaric, more insinuating sounded the banging of the drums when Manuela, her great eyes asparkle, paused in the center of the floor, and separating her feet, commenced to perform undulating contortions evolved in the steaming jungles of Haiti. Gradually the maddening tempo increased until even the waiters were swaying and tapping tired feet.

A sibilant sigh circled the room when at last Manuela suddenly gathered her skirts high above her knees and prepared for the second phase of the *cumdavle.* A white pillar swaying seductively amid the smoke, Manuela de Macéo held every eye so firmly that only Kilgour noticed North circle around in back of the tables and disappear through the curtained door leading to Manuela's dressing room.

The corridor, reeking of cheap perfume and plastered with fly-blown notices of long forgotten acts, led towards a series of doors.

A half-dressed actress was smoking in the nearest of the stuffy little dressing-rooms, but the second one was empty and there, hanging from a peg, was the mantilla of Manuela de Macéo.

His face a bronze mask of subdued anxiety, North closed the door firmly behind him, then skirted a chair hung with fragile garments to furiously examine the cosmetic-littered dressing table.

"Damn!" He flung aside the gold mesh handbag and renewed his search by testing the pockets of a smartly tailored sport coat. No luck! The wild throbbing of those nearby drums was not louder than the beat of North's heart. Had he miscalculated?

Flying fingers, expert at search, felt a trio of hats, then hastily examined three pairs of tiny dancing shoes. Still no luck! And the music was reaching a crescendo! He had failed—and Moscow would win. It was a bitter thought.

Smothering a groan he straightened, lit a cigarette and was calmly seated at Manuela's dressing table when she burst in, her black eyes aflame and her rounded breasts still heaving from exertion.

Intently he watched her eyes and caught their involuntary flicker to the right of the cosmetic table behind him. Then, relaxing somewhat and with slender hips swaying Manuela advanced, a puzzled smile on her encrimsoned lips.

"Why did you come in here?" she demanded. "The red-haired man is outside."

"I'm frightfully sorry." Smiling, North got to his feet and his narrow dark head barely cleared the ceiling. "You see, I couldn't watch your dance and think too."

"Gracias!" Manuela stepped close and, reaching behind her, apparently undid some hooks of her costume. "You will have to go now."

Captain North nodded and started to turn, but flung himself violently back when, with the speed of an arrow, Manuela expertly lunged at his arm-pit where the glittering six inches of her knife would have found the easiest possible entrance to his heart. For so big a man Hugh North, however, was amazingly quick and in an instant he held her with one hand clapped firmly over her lips.

Manuela de Macéo fought like a starved tigress—kicking, writhing, scratching and trying to sink her strong white teeth into the muffling palm. Her struggles were quite futile. A chair and a stool went crashing over, but now the girl's surprisingly strong young body was forced to the dirty floor, and North knelt upon her shoulder blades, pinning her flat and so momentarily freeing

a hand without permitting an outcry.

Had that instinctive glance told him what he wanted to know? Did what he'd so earnestly sought lie in the big powder box on the right of her dressing table? No telling. She was such a superb actress—

His fingers, fumbling amid the flaky substance, caught the edge of something and a small blizzard of powder particles whirled out over the room. But just then the dancer heaved frantically and succeeded in wrenching her mouth free of his silencing hand. She screamed for help.

"Mil gracias," North flung over his shoulder as he bounded for the door.

A waiter and two sinister individuals were rushing down the corridor. North leaped to meet them and his fist caught the foremost man flush on the point of the jaw so that he fell, tripping the waiter who was immediately behind him. The third man whipped out a pistol and on his neck North felt the heat of the discharge as he ducked and butted the gunman, for all the world like a Paris *apache.*

The pistol went clattering.

Bedlam broke out in el Tritón when North burst out into the street.

"Thief! Stop thief!" Out of the front door raced a torrent of menacing figures, but Captain North was well away, the powdered square of paper in his pocket.

"But I still can't understand why you so quickly lost interest in that red-haired Johnnie," Kilgour persisted when North, back at Police Headquarters, once more prepared the ink and water bath.

"For two reasons. Those hairs came from a red-headed person all right, but they were from a beard and Manuela's 'friend' had none. Moreover, he wasn't even freshly shaved—though he might have removed the beard since this afternoon. So I went over to look. And, second, our man's hair was a shade or two darker than the decoy dear little Manuela found for us."

"Think he was one of the iron-curtain crowd?" Kilgour demanded.

"Hardly. More likely he's just a conveniently red-headed friend of Manuela's. We'll find out for sure if the police pick her up. No, Bruce, the man we want is probably miles out to sea. I think he was Von Zastrow's chief local roughneck and I'm rather looking forward to meeting him aboard one of our destroyers tomorrow sometime."

The American very intently scanned the blank sheet of paper from which Manuela de Macéo had torn the slip for her address and then, every nerve strumming like a banjo string, he immersed

the sheet which had so nearly cost him his life.

"Those ink spots, Bruce, have troubled me all along. I simply can't account for them any other way. I was incredibly stupid not to have guessed what was up when Manuela so cleverly stowed the rest of that blank sheet in her purse. The killer must have overlooked it. Quite an actress, that girl. She had me fooled for a while."

As the two waited for the sheet to dry, Captain North lit a cigarette. Uninterrupted, the night life of Havana now in full blast, sounded its low peculiar obbligato.

"Bruce!" North's hand trembled just a little as he opened the oven door. What if he had been fooled—what if this was not the original?

"By God!" Kilgour burst out. "There *is* something on it!"

Hurriedly scrawled in Spanish was the following message:

S.S. Trinidad, *Nov.* 10
Esteban:
Arms shipment came aboard last night. Will transship to S.S. Cumana *at rendezvous, Lat.* 16° 30 *min. N.—Long.* 83° 15 *min. W. We sail* 4 *P.M. today.*
Pablo.

"Ah! I wondered why Manuela kept the sheet," said Bruce Kilgour. "Fancy it was blackmail or to make trouble for Pablo—whoever *he* is."

"Shouldn't wonder," grunted the American as he made a translation.

Bruce Kilgour nodded in admiration.

"Neat work, Hugh—for a man starting to work only this afternoon with nothing but three clues and a corpse."

"Lat. 16° 30 min. N. and Long. 83° 15 min. W.," North repeated as his pencil flashed on to encode divers radiograms which would send those waiting destroyers steaming hurriedly southwards. As he worked Hugh North pursed his lips and perhaps unconsciously began to whistle the air of that haunting dance tune entitled, "That's All I Want to Know."

the cat killer

by . . . Peter Harris

It's not too unwise an idea to pamper a well-loved cat. He may serve as a surrogate for murder.

"As a general rule," said the inspector, "I take no interest in people who poison cats."

He relaxed comfortably in his chair, and lighted a cigarette. Then, as if sensing my impatience, he went on quickly: "But it just happened that Mrs. Briggs, whose prize Persian had been poisoned so unaccountably, was a distant cousin of my wife's. I was living in the neighborhood at the time, and my wife kept telling me what a shame it was about Tibby, and—well, you know what a woman can be like when she gets a stubborn, set idea about a thing like that.

"So that's how I came to take up, almost against my will, my one and only case of cat-poisoning. Yet I can't say I'm sorry I wasn't misled into taking a firm stand by refusing to meddle right at the start.

"What I really didn't like about the business was the complete absence of leads. Mrs. Briggs said Tibby was docile and affectionate, and hadn't an enemy in the world. What was even

Peter Harris has an uncanny genius for instilling a depth almost cinemascopic into murder mysteries confined to the province of the very small. He has a penchant for suburban cottages with their eccentric inmates, or the narrow, subjective worlds of killers in retirement. This time it is the slyly insinuating purr of a cat no longer in the land of the living that deepens three-dimensionally his chill portrayal of human wickedness.

more disturbing, her nephew George, who was visiting her at the time, made an aggressive issue of this.

"To be completely frank, I disliked George straight off. He was a glibly self-assured young man, and I thought at first he was just being attentive to his aunt in the hope of inheriting her property. But he did appear to be a sincere cat-lover. He was always talking about the two handsome Persians he owned, and frequently exhibited at shows.

"What's more to the point, the neighbors hadn't apparently borne Tibby any malice. So I just had to begin the hard way, by going back and trying to find out where the cat had picked up the poison.

"Mrs. Briggs had gone into town to do some shopping late that afternoon, because she was expecting George on the six o'clock train. The butcher and the fishseller were due to deliver and she had left the back door unlocked so that they could simply walk in and leave their orders on the kitchen table.

" 'I got home about five-thirty,' she told me. 'And I put the percolator on the stove for coffee before going to the station to meet George. I usually fed Tibby before six and after I'd had a cup of coffee I minced the steak which the butcher had brought, and put it in the saucer. Then I went to the station—but George wasn't on the train.'

" 'That's right,' confirmed George. 'I was held up at the office over some unexpected accounts. I wired my aunt saying I wouldn't arrive until next day, but the telegram didn't reach her in time.'

" 'It came later in the evening,' said Mrs. Briggs. 'When I got home again at six-thirty or thereabouts the meat in the saucer had been eaten, and there was no sign of Tibby. I never saw him again until next morning, when Mr. Brownley from across the road came and said he'd found him lying dead at the bottom of his garden under the rhododendrons. I just couldn't believe it at first.'

"Of course, Mrs. Briggs washed Tibby's plate by then, and there was nothing to be gained by examining it for evidence. But I looked around notwithstanding, and scooped out some particles of powder in the joints of the kitchen table.

" 'It looks to me,' I said, 'as if somebody came through the back door when you were out and put some of this powder—I'm pretty sure it's arsenic—in the meat the butcher brought.'

" 'How could anyone be so malicious?' she said doubtfully. 'Do you think it was one of the neighbors?'

" 'Mrs. Briggs,' I said, 'I'm damned if I know. Neighbors

are like everybody else—and human nature has some dark angles.'

"I was merely being candid, but Mrs. Briggs took offense, and said that if the police couldn't solve so small a problem nobody would be safe in his or her bed.

"I pointed out that by five o'clock it had been quite dark, and that practically anyone with plenty of malice on tap could have come in unobserved and poisoned the cat's meat. But she wouldn't listen to reason, and became so angry about the whole thing that I picked up my hat, and told her that I had an urgent appointment elsewhere.

"Well, believe it or not, she followed me to the door, still castigating the police, while her nephew stood in the background with his hands in his pockets looking insultingly smug and triumphant. I couldn't have disliked anyone more.

" 'If you ask me,' I said—unable to resist a parting shot—'you pampered the little beast anyway. There are plenty of human beings who would have been grateful for that steak.' And I started walking up the drive towards my car, almost wishing I'd chosen another profession.

"But when I was half way to the gate, and she was still talking I heard something that rang a bell. I turned back.

" 'What did you say,' I demanded.

" 'I said: "Pampered my foot," ' she repeated angrily. 'That shows how much you know about it. Do you think I would have given Tibby the steak I ordered for myself if the *fish heads* had come?'

"And then I gave George a forthright and accusing look because I had a shrewd idea that when I investigated I would find that he hadn't been far from the town that afternoon, even though he'd wired that he wouldn't be arriving until next day.

"As you may have guessed, there was no prosecution. There was no need for one. As soon as I had taken Mrs. Briggs quietly aside and told her who had killed her cat, she changed her will. And then, you see, there was no longer any point in George trying again to poison his aunt.

"He had no way of knowing the fishseller had neglected to send over the fish heads and that his aunt would see to it that Tibby got her steak instead."

The Inspector nodded.

"In a way it turned out well. My wife—being, as I think I mentioned, a distant cousin of Mrs. Briggs—will be coming in for an enviable legacy one day."

the key

by . . . Michael Innes

The murdered woman had a very considerable source of income. But that didn't quite explain the gruesome facts in the case.

"THERE MUST be some key to the affair," Inspector Cadover said as he turned from the window and stared at his former colleague. But his eyes retained their distant focus, so that Appleby had the sensation of being some remote and inanimate object, just visible on the horizon commanded from this eyrie high in New Scotland Yard. "There's a key to every murder, after all."

"Undoubtedly there is." Appleby's agreement was placid. "Only sometimes it gets buried with the corpse."

"Rubbish!" Cadover's nerves were frayed. "And the corpse isn't buried yet, anyhow. They're still on a rather elaborate P.M. You see, this Honoria Clodd had been dead at least three days when they found her, and I'm anxious to narrow down the time all I can. Of course, it may not be murder at all. Superficially it looked just like another dismal head-in-the-oven affair. But if it was, then Honoria was a much more economically-minded girl than one would take her for.

Michael Innes has a rare talent for instilling a touch of the macabre and mordantly satiric into the kind of brilliant, step-by-step police procedure tales for which his fellow scribe, Freeman Wills Crofts—also no stranger to these pages—is famous. His most characteristic novel bears the title, DAFFODIL AFFAIR *and concerns a crazy girl, a horse, a house and a witch. Here is a shorter Innes shocker, just as enthralling.*

There she was in the kitchen of this discreet country cottage of hers, and her head was cosily in the oven, sure enough. But the gas was turned off—and only her fingerprints were on the tap."

"I see." Appleby's interest did not seem very lively. "Could she have reached that tap from where she lay?"

"Certainly she could. And the thing is just conceivable as suicide. She *may* have turned off the tap herself. Not really out of economy, of course. That's only a joke."

"Ah," said Appleby.

"She may have thought better of killing herself at the last moment, as so many of them do. And so she may have reached out desperately at the last moment and managed to turn the tap. Indeed, the position of the arm rather suggested it.

"And this cottage was where she lived?"

"Not as a regular thing," said Cadover. "Although she was pretty well retired from the stage, she had rather an expensive flat here in town. The cottage was there on a lock-up, occasional week-end basis. The sort of cottage where you take down your provisions in tins, do all your own chores, and have absolutely no questions asked. A man worked in the garden on Wednesdays. I doubt if he'd have been welcome about the place at other times."

"The suggestion," said Appleby, "appears to be that Miss Clodd—"

"Mrs. Jolly. She was married—quite legally—to a nebulous person called Jolly. He was, I think, essential to her way of life."

"Husbands sometimes are."

"You misunderstand me," Cadover's solemn gloom grew. "The woman had more money than she deserved, even if she was quite thrivingly no better than she ought to have been. Unless I've got it all wrong, she was not merely immoral, but criminal as well. Jolly turned up at awkward moments—"

"And decidedly belied his name. In fact, a particularly ugly kind of blackmail." Appleby stood up. "Well, it's nice to hear that things are still going on as usual. And you've got a murderer to hunt for, all right. It's overwhelmingly probable that your Honoria was liquidated by somebody who couldn't afford to lose either his reputation or any more money. Don't forget, in the excitement of hanging the fellow, to get the virtuous Jolly locked up at the same time. And now I must be off."

"And, mind you, there were signs of a struggle." Cadover was following Appleby doggedly to the door. "Bruises in various places, broken finger-nails, rather a nasty—"

"Quite so." Appleby, with his

hand on the door-knob, drew back at the sound of a sharp rap from outside. Hard upon it, a young man burst precipitately into the room.

"I say, sir—" The young man checked himself, recognized Appleby, and hurried on. "They've found something. *A key. And it nearly got buried with the corpse.*"

Inspector Cadover sat down heavily at his desk. John Appleby, looking considerably less retired from the C.I.D. than he had done thirty seconds before, was staring at the contents of a small box which the young man had produced.

"A Yale key," Appleby said, "—and a odd little bit of twisted wire."

The young man nodded. "Just found by the post-mortem wallahs in Honoria's tummy." With the confidence of one whose cheerful grin operates some inches above a most respectable school tie, the young man glanced from Appleby to his chief. "We know poor old Honoria to have been of a disordered life. It looks as if she was of a disordered appetite as well. 'The Case of the Jolly Ostrich.' Honoria had not exactly repented of her sins, but at least the iron had entered."

"Be quiet, boy, for pity's sake." Cadover in his turn was staring at the exhibits in the little box. "You say they found these in the woman's *inside?*"

"Just that, sir. What you might call internal evidence. Or an inside job."

At this further, distinctly ghoulish sally, Cadover resignedly groaned. Then he turned to Appleby. "Of all the absolutely mysterious things—"

"A flood of light." Appleby was immobile and his lips scarcely moved. Only his hand had gone out and, very gently, his fingers were at play upon the little twist of thin, spring-like wire.

"You mean that this—this lunacy positively improves matters?" Cadover had risen, taken three strides to his window, and was contemplating a considerable area of London with every appearance of extreme malevolence.

"There *ought* to be a flood of light in it. Remember Dupin."

"Dupin?" The young man looked up as one who delights in the fruits of an extensive literary education. "You mean Poe's Frog?"

"Exactly. Poe's Frog. Poe's immortal and archetypal French detective. Look out, he said, for what has never happened before, and pin your faith on that. Well, here it is. Never before, I'm quite certain, has Scotland Yard found in the stomach of a presumably murdered woman a Yale key and an inch of a half of twist-

ed wire. It's an uncommonly interesting thing."

"To be sure it is." Cadover was suddenly convinced and hearty. "It's a *most* interesting thing. And just the sort of thing to interest *you*. Now, my dear Appleby, if you should care to look into it, to poke around—"

Appleby shook his head. "The doctors have done that for us. And if your mystery is ever to be solved"—he tapped the box—"it will be now, and on the strength of what is before our noses."

"I say! Doctors—that's an idea." The young man was suddenly excited. "Look at that bit of wire. It's like some sort of spring clip. Have you considered the possibility it might have been left in poor Honoria by a careless surgeon?"

"Who also absentmindedly dropped in his latchkey?" Cadover's sarcasm was suddenly withering. "I sometimes really think—"

A knock at the door interrupted Cadover, and a uniformed sergeant thrust his head into the room.

"Beg pardon, sir—but we 'ave Sir Urien Pendragon below, and wanting to see whoever is concerned with the case of the late Mrs. Jolly."

"Good heavens! Well, show him up." Cadover was very reasonably staggered at the august scientist's name. "Appleby, do you think he can have been one of—"

"I haven't a doubt of it." Appleby returned his hat to the peg from which he had taken it a few minutes before. "By the way, have you a line on the late bereaved Jolly?"

"He ought to be presenting himself any minute."

"In that case, I really think I'll stay. Just for ten minutes or so, until the affair is cleared up."

Breathing hard, Cadover nodded to the young man. "Clear out," he said. "A person like Sir Urien may take two of us. But he certainly won't take three."

"Poor Mrs. Jolly," said Sir Urien, "was a near neighbor of mine in the country. We were quite intimate friends. So naturally I am greatly distressed."

"And you feel that you may have valuable information to give?" Cadover's reaction to his visitor's eminence was to turn eminently official and grim.

"Well, yes—although the matter is rather a delicate one." Sir Urien adjusted his eye-glass and for a moment let his fingers stray over his beautifully trimmed grey beard. "The fact is that there was almost a sentimental element in the relationship—on poor Mrs. Jolly's part, at least. I was really afraid that a distorted view of it might affect her relations with her husband, who is a most violent and ungoverned

man. They were already on very ill terms, and indeed seldom saw each other."

"We have some ideas on *that*." Cadover tapped his writing-pad. "And you say, Sir Urien, that you have been abroad?"

"I have. It was, in fact, a sense of this possible awkwardness that made me decide to go abroad some ten days ago. I went to my friends the Mountroyals at Mentone"—Sir Urien paused as if to let this impressive information sink in—"and I intended to stay for some three weeks. But government business brought me home a couple of days ago, and I heard of the shocking tragedy only this morning."

Appleby, who had been standing silently by the window during these preliminary exchanges, suddenly spoke. "May I ask, Sir Urien if during your holiday you were constantly in the society of your friends?"

"Most certainly." Sir Urien looked blandly surprised at the question. "Charles Mountroyal and I are very old friends. *Arcades ambo* would be a just description of us."

"Thank you." Appleby appeared to relapse into abstraction.

"Sir Urien, the facts as we know them are these." Cadover's tone was quite expressionless. "The body of Mrs. Jolly—or Miss Honoria Clodd—was discovered yesterday morning by a hiker who, having lost his way and got no reply at the door, was sufficiently curious to peer through the kitchen window. She had died of coal-gas poisoning at some period which could not have been less than three or more than six days previously."

"Dear me, I am more than ever distressed. Had I not been abroad, I might have done something to prevent so rash an act."

"We think it was murder."

"You appall me. But I am not wholly surprised. Her husband is unbalanced—is subject, in fact, to overwhelming fits of pathological jealousy. And while one must admire, as one is likely to admire in Othello, the devotion from which such a passion takes its rise—"

"Sir Urien, I have to tell you that our information in this matter is quite different. As we see it, Mrs. Jolly was not a woman of integrity. And she and her husband conspired to exploit the fact in a manner that would have brought them well within the grasp of the criminal law. Jolly posed as the outraged discoverer of his wife's infidelities, and then accepted money as the price of his silence and, I suppose, complaisance. Your pictures of an outraged husband committing murder in a fit of uncontrolled jealousy is therefore nonsense."

"You pain me inexpressibly. You horrify me." Sir Urien, who had certainly gone a little pale, nevertheless again stroked his

beard comfortably enough. "And if I may say so, Inspector, I am disturbed that a man in your position should display so strange an ignorance of human nature.

"Suppose—as I do not for a moment admit—the position to be as you describe. It is a matter of common knowledge that a man who exploits a woman after the fashion you mention is particularly likely to react with an insane fury should she transfer any element of—um—genuine regard to a relationship initially entered into solely for gain."

Cadover, thus blandly reprimanded, breathed harder than ever.

And once more Appleby stirred by the window. "That," he said, "is perfectly true. I see, Sir Urien, that you possess some insight into the minds of the criminal classes. You know this fellow Jolly?"

Sir Urien hesitated. "We have met. He is not a person whom I should care to number among my familiar acquaintances."

"I believe it might be interesting if you met him again."

And Cadover, taking the hint, leaned forward at his desk and pressed a bell.

Jolly was a grey and clammy creature, at once insubstantial and acutely disagreeable. At his approach, Appleby felt, it would be natural to raise a protecting arm, as if to avert the descent of an enveloping cobweb. But in point of fact Jolly had retreated sulkily to a corner of the room. During the past five minutes Cadover had been giving him a decidedly bad time.

"Perhaps she did and perhaps she didn't," said Jolly allusively. "Perhaps she had and perhaps she had not. My motto's human freedom every time. Honoria and I weren't all that thick any longer, and I tell you it was no concern of mine."

"We appreciate that you were not often in your wife's society." Cadover had the air of gazing straight through the human cobweb before him. "But it will at least not be difficult to prove that she was your only visible means of support. She had money, Mr. Jolly, and you knew how she came by it. I suggest that you need not look far—" and Cadover glanced quickly at the silent Sir Urien Pendragon—"in order to recall one quite considerable source of income."

"I tell you, there was no vice in Honoria." Jolly licked his lips and looked sidelong at Sir Urien with what appeared to be furtive fear and fury. "There was no vice in her at all. I don't say she didn't have some very pleasant gentlemen friends. And I don't say she didn't have presents. Rather free with those friends' belongings she could sometimes be, I don't deny. Human Freedom is my motto, and

Liberty Hall was hers. Other people's Halls, if you follow me."

For a moment there was an odd note of evil pride in Jolly's voice. "Once she borrowed a butler, and once she borrowed a deer forest. And it wasn't her fault if both of them proved more trouble than what they were worth."

"Might it not have occurred to her to borrow a car?" It was Appleby who spoke. Quite suddenly, he had taken the middle of the room.

"I don't say it wouldn't, and I don't say it would." Jolly, thoroughly wary and alarmed now, seemed to find reassurance in this formula.

"In fact, was there not a particular car? Rather a grand car—"

"I protest!" Sir Urien had risen to his feet. "In Mr. Jolly's interest I protest against this highly irregular interrogation. I demand that he be permitted to withdraw, and to answer no more questions except on legal advice."

"I have no objection in the world." Appleby gently smiled —and simultaneously made a gesture that sent the spare Cadover with an agile bound to the door. "But with you, yourself, Sir Urien, it is another matter."

* * *

"She told her own story." Cadover and Appleby were again alone, and it was now the latter who, as he spoke, gazed out far across London.

"As to whether there was vice in Honoria, we have our own opinion. But there was certainly brains. And guts, of a sort. She knew she was being murdered, and she was determined that her murderer should pay.

"As for Pendragon, it was the demand for his car that was at once a last straw and an inspiration. They were near neighbors; she had pestered him to have the use of this grand car; he went abroad—and posted her the key of the particular garage in which it was kept. At a guess, I should say it was some distance from his house. Or perhaps he had sent away the servants and the place was deserted. That will be something for you to find out.

"He knew the wretched woman's mentality—had good reason to know it. She was utterly selfish in her pleasures, and went off to possess herself of the gorgeous new prize alone. She unlocked the garage and entered. She got into the car and slammed the door. In a matter of seconds, I fancy, she knew that she was done for—that she had shut herself up in a brilliantly contrived lethal chamber.

"Pendragon was a scientist. It wasn't difficult for him to arrange matters so that when the door of the car shut, several other things happened simultaneously. The

doors locked themselves. I have no doubt that the door of the garage—it was probably of the roll-up sort—slid down and presented a blank and innocent face to the world. And already coal-gas was pouring into the car.

"Honoria struggled, trying to smash her way out through what would certainly be a virtually unbreakable glass. The signs of that struggle were on her body when it was found. Within minutes she was dead. And as the date of her death would later be approximately determined by the state of the body, Sir Urien Pendragon with his Mentone alibi would be safe. When he did return to England he had only to drive round to Honoria's deserted cottage and leave her with her head in the oven.

"He used her fingers to turn on the gas for a bit, and then turned it off again, being afraid that a great stink of gas might attract the notice of a passer-by a little too soon. Pendragon was invulnerable—or would have been but for the swift working of Honoria's wits, intent on retribution. She swallowed the key, which would have carried us a good long way in the end. And she swallowed something that ought to have cried *motorcar* the moment we looked at it, even though it is twisted a little out of shape.

"You might find that little twist of wire on the floor, or in the glove box of any car, for it is simply the little clip often used instead of a nut to secure a terminal to its sparking-plug. Honoria knew there would be a post-mortem, and she sent us the only message she could. One can't but admire her. Even when dying, it must have taken resolution to swallow those things."

Cadover nodded. "I hope a jury will swallow them."

"There's a good chance that they will. The key is indeed the key to the case, for it will certainly prove to be the key of Pendragon's garage. And it is very unlikely that he has had time to remove all traces of the elaborate set-up he had to contrive."

"He made a solid bid for freedom." Cadover had joined Appleby and now both were staring out over the gray city. "Shall you be sorry if he hangs?"

Appleby considered. "I didn't like him, but I like Honoria's kind of game no better. So my answer must be like the abdominable Jolly's. I shall and I shan't."

—Continued from back cover

Yes! YOU GET $15.00 WORTH OF MYSTERIES AT ONCE — FREE!

Including 3 of the Latest Smash Hits of

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

IMAGINE GETTING $15 worth of brand-new mysteries right away — FREE! Full-length hard-bound books by "champion" mystery authors. SIX great books in all — THREE of them by the "undisputed king of mystery writers," Erle Stanley Gardner! ANOTHER by the great Mary Roberts Rinehart! ANOTHER by that cracker-jack writer Mignon Eberhart! ANOTHER by that expert baffler, Stuart Palmer! You get *six new* books that would actually cost you a total of $15 if you bought them — but now they're yours FREE!

Why do we make such a liberal offer? Simply to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in the famous Detective Book Club—the only Club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one third the usual cost!*

The Cream of the Best NEW Mysteries

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop"—by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Stuart Palmer, Manning Coles, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many *other* famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many of them are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (a $6.00 to $7.50 value) for only $1.89.

You Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview", which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need NOT take any specific number of books — only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books — by the best authors. (2) You save TWO THIRDS the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean — delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Postcard for Six FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once — FREE — the six complete mystery thrillers, described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books. But this exceptional offer may never be repeated. So don't risk disappointment. Clip the postcard now, and mail it to:

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., N. Y.

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE — **SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD**

43

TS

Walter J. Black, President
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $1.89 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. (*Books shipped in U. S. A. only.*)

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

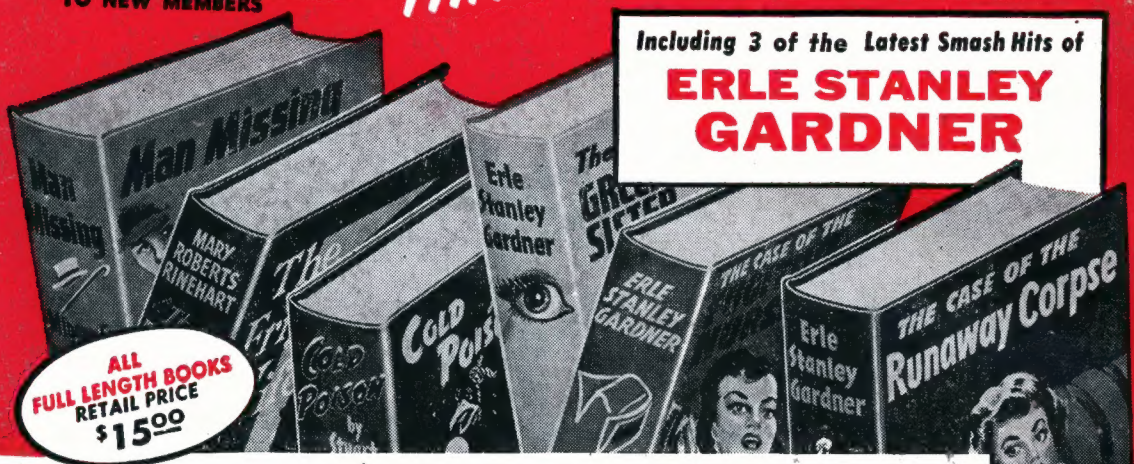
City.....Zone No. (if any).....State.....

Free- All Six of these Thrill-Packed Mysteries!

TO NEW MEMBERS

Including 3 of the Latest Smash Hits of

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER



ALL FULL LENGTH BOOKS RETAIL PRICE $15.00

JUST MAIL COUPON TO GET THESE SIX GREAT NEW MYSTERIES FREE—AT ONCE!

1 THE CASE OF THE RUNAWAY CORPSE
By Erle Stanley Gardner

Myrna hires Perry Mason to get a letter saying she plans to poison her husband Ed. (Ed has just died of *poisoning!*) All Perry finds is—*blank* paper!

2 THE CASE OF THE FUGITIVE NURSE
By Erle Stanley Gardner

Perry Mason sneaks into an apartment; finds an *empty* safe. Not sinister . . . . EXCEPT that the TENANT had already been found MURDERED!

3 THE CASE OF THE GREEN-EYED SISTER
By Erle Stanley Gardner

Mason's client wants to get back damaging evidence against a Mr. Fritch. Then Fritch is killed. Mason and client *need* an alibi—but don't have one!

4 MAN MISSING
By Mignon G. Eberhart

Sarah noticed odd things at the hospital. And then—the too-still figure on Lieutenant Parly's bed. *A MAN DEAD FOR 3 YEARS!*

5 THE FRIGHTENED WIFE
By Mary Roberts Rinehart

Anne kept her earnings secret; afraid Fred would kill her. Then she lay dying of a bullet—with Fred beside her, *dead!* (One of 4 mysteries in book.)

6 COLD POISON
By Stuart Palmer

Four people get threats. 3 are *scared stiff.* The 4th is just STIFF! "Accident," says coroner. But Miss Withers says MURDER. Her only clue is *a missing finger!*

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
(Sec. 34.9, P.L.&R.)
Roslyn, N.Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD
No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
ROSLYN, L. I.
NEW YORK

DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS SENSATIONAL OFFER!

•

MAIL COUPON AT ONCE!

continued on inside cover